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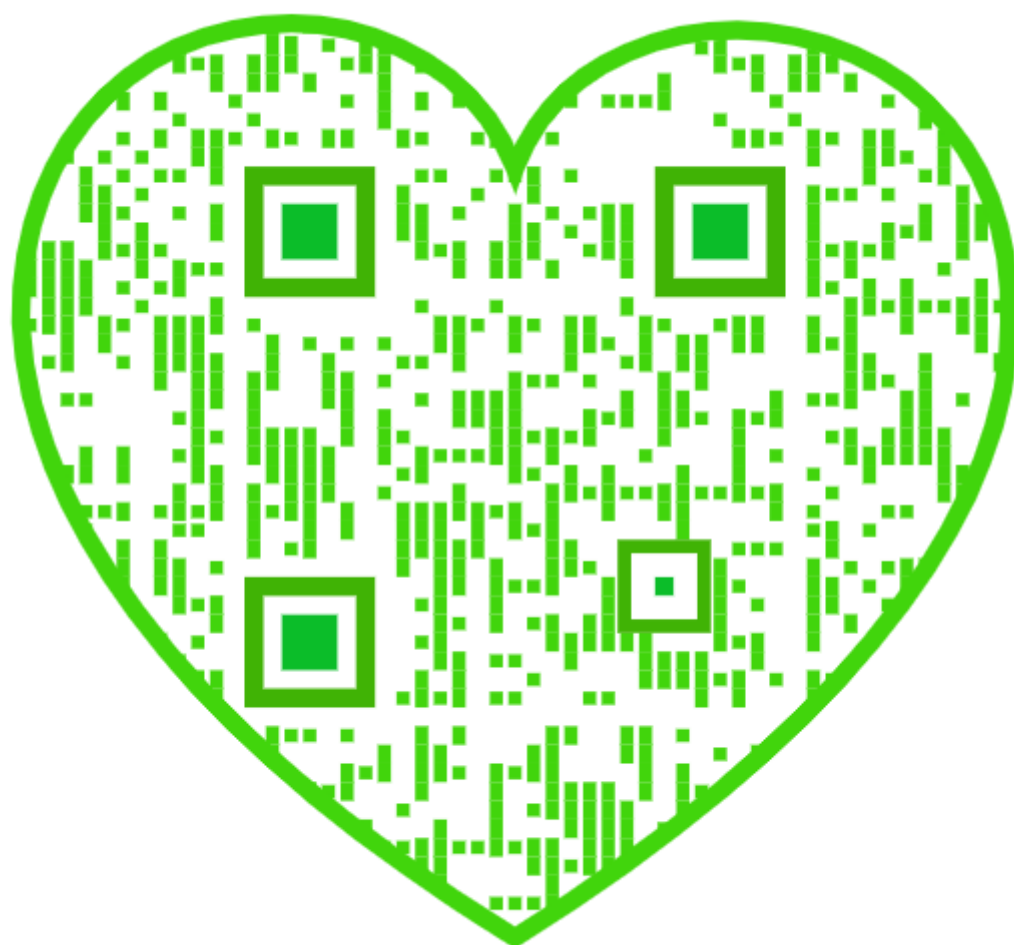
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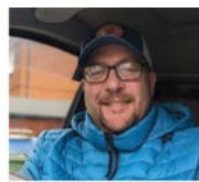
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WELCOME

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HELLO

The daffs are blooming, lambs are frolicking in the fields and the sun is shining. Yes, spring is definitely in the air! It

feels like Christmas was only a few days ago, but somehow the May bank holidays are just around the corner and that means it's time to get out into the great outdoors and banish those winter blues.

Demand for campsite pitches is sure to be high again this year, so make sure you move quickly to get the site you want. Hopefully you've already booked your bank holiday pitches but, if not, you

will need to be quick. Your first port of call should be Premier Parks at premierparks.outandaboutlive.co.uk – a group of exceptional campsites around the UK, inspected and assessed by our editors.

Don't forget, too, the brilliant Campervan Campout is coming up soon. There are still a few camping pitches available so head to outandaboutlive.co.uk/shows/campervan-campout-festival for more details.

Iain

IAIN DUFF | Editor

COVER PICTURE ■ imageBROKER.com/ Alamy

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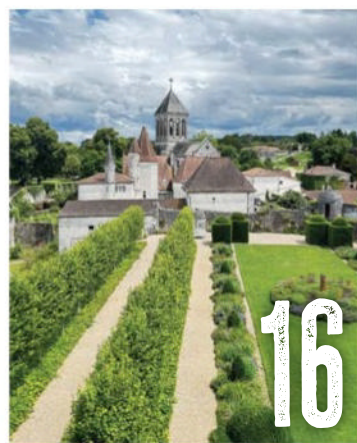


MAY 2025



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SCAN ME

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DEVON

Devon is a stunning holiday destination that offers something for everyone



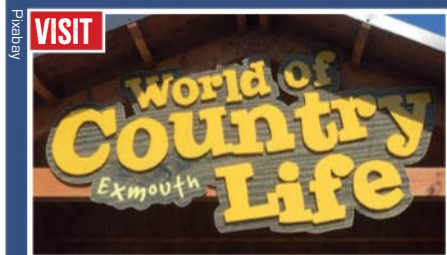
With miles of magnificent coastline and acres of gorgeous countryside, Devon is one of the most beautiful parts of the country.

The coast is blessed with secluded coves and vast stretches of beach, both sandy and pebbled. The South West Coast Path winds its way along the coastline and there are

numerous short sections that you can tackle.

The recently constructed Exe Estuary Trail is a 26-mile-long cycle route which runs from Dawlish to Exmouth, passing through towns, villages and the city of Exeter.

Further down the coast is pretty Torquay on the English Riviera, with its photogenic harbour and big wheel.



DISCOVER COUNTRY LIVING

World of Country Life is a great day out for all ages. There's plenty on offer if you want to keep youngsters happy, while the Exhibition Hall is full of memorabilia from yesteryear including working farm machinery, an indoor Victorian street and a fantastic collection of vintage cars.
W worldofcountrylife.co.uk



EXPLORING ON FOOT

The 38-mile East Devon Way spans the area from Exmouth to Lyme Regis and alongside some pretty villages with thatched cottages; there are a few ups and downs along the route but it's perfect for discovering this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
W eastdevonway.org.uk



COFTON HOLIDAYS

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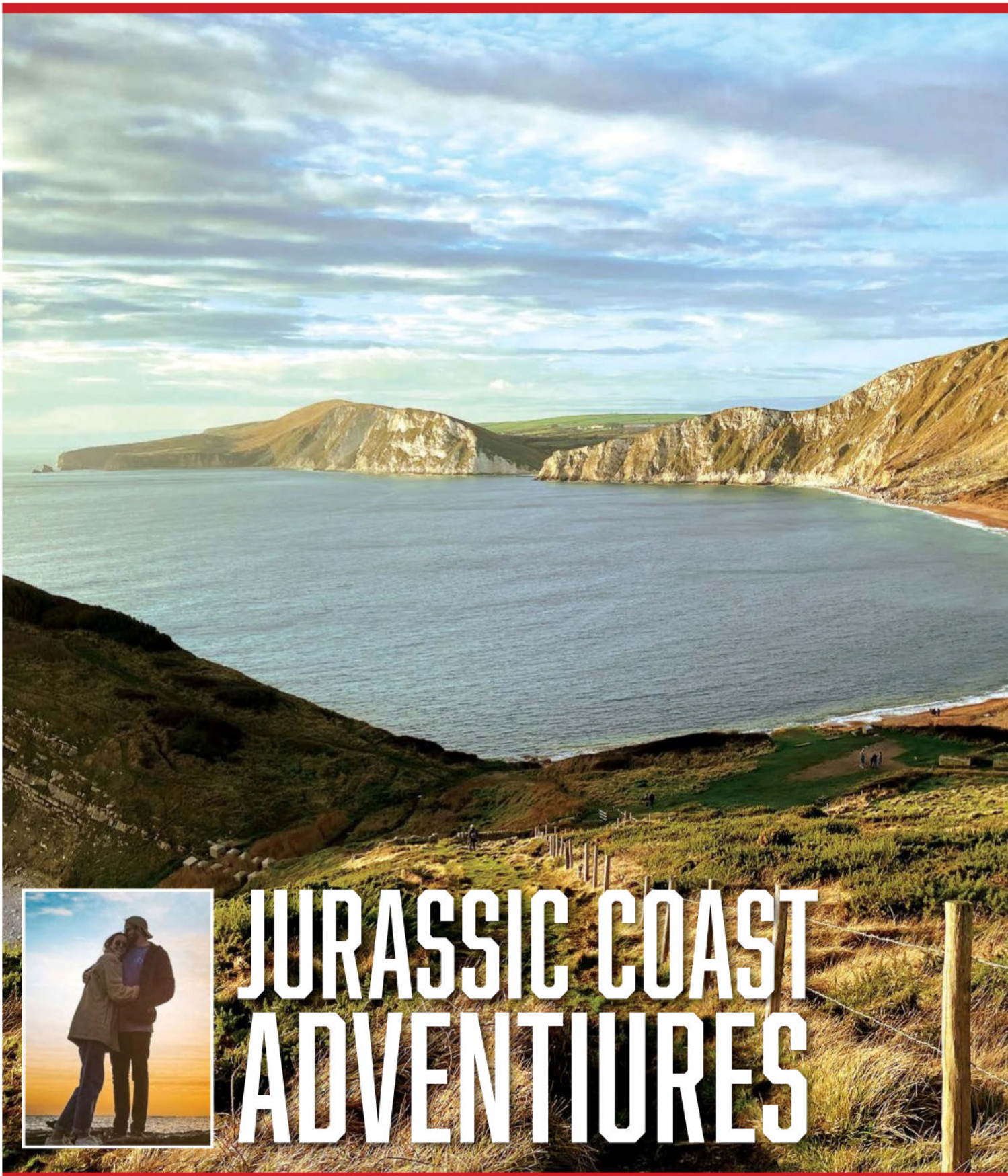
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JURASSIC COAST ADVENTURES

ROAD TRIPS DORSET



Dorset's Jurassic Coast is a playground for the young, and the young at heart

Words & pictures ■ Jamie Hearne

Many people around the world are drawn to the coast for a variety of reasons. Dorset's Jurassic Coast earned its place as a UNESCO

World Heritage site for its historic and geographic features and wild beauty. Additionally, this stretch of Dorset's coastline has drawn the attention of outdoor adventurers and extreme sport enthusiasts alike.

Dorset is the county I am fortunate enough to call home. Having lived here for most of my life, I have had the privilege to explore its beautifully varied landscapes thoroughly. Over the last few years, I

MAIN PICTURE

Another view from the other side of Worbarrow Bay at Tyneham

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT

Tom climbing at Dancing Ledge

Me getting ready for a paddleboard at Tyneham

have come to know Dorset more intimately and gained an appreciation for it in its entirety, but never more so than when using it as a playground for outdoor adventure.

My girlfriend, Lucy, and I can be found on most Friday evenings frantically preparing our campervan for a busy weekend in one of several locations. We'd make sure we had enough gas for our burner, enough food and, most importantly, our gear for climbing, paddleboarding and snorkelling, as well as our wetsuits, swimwear, surfboards, hiking boots and suitable clothing for any occasion.

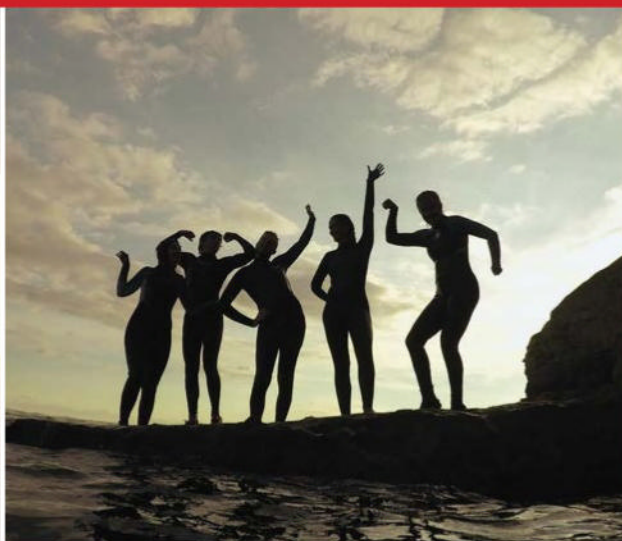
We'd often manage to fit several activities into our weekend, or let the weekend pan out based on the weather conditions we were presented with. For this reason, our 'van was often less of a campervan and more of an outdoor adventure storage container on wheels.

This tour was just a quick drive

✓ TOP TIP

- If you've been inspired to try any of these outdoor activities, give it a go with a guide first – there are numerous activity providers in the area that can offer sample sessions of these adventure sports

ROAD TRIPS DORSET



eastward onto the A351. The excitement builds as we meander through the country roads and reach the iconic Corfe Castle towering splendidly above us. It is at this point that I know we have just entered Dorset's hub of outdoor adventure.

This location can be reached from the ideally situated Spyway car park by means of a 30-minute walk. After passing through several fields, we reach the grassy slope that leads steeply down toward the clifftop. From what feels



like the edge of the earth, Dancing Ledge is still relatively hidden but, if you clamber over the wooden stile and walk to the cliff edge, you'll see there is a stepped path that will take you down to the rocky shelf known as Dancing Ledge.

We climb in this area regularly, yet my favourite activity at Dancing Ledge is coasteering. I first discovered the exhilarating activity after winning two tickets to a coasteering experience with a local outdoor activity centre. My sister and I thoroughly enjoyed the day and we have returned many times

**ABOVE
LEFT TO RIGHT**
View from the cave at Winspit

The whole family jumping at Dancing Ledge

Lucy climbing in Portland with Tom belaying

INSET
Lucy walking down to Winspit

BELOW
The clifftop car park at Kimmeridge Bay

since with friends and family.

Nothing compares to the exhilarating moment when you're stood still, toes curling over the rock's rough edge, and the sea breeze blowing through your hair as you're waiting to take that first plunge into the ocean's depths.

After a swim along the coast to the right you will reach various areas where it is possible to jump from the rocks into the water. The jumps range from half a metre to 15m so there is something for every level of thrill seeker. What's more is that there are some caves to explore, too. Often, my favourite moment of the day is when we all swim into the entrance of a cave. The pink rock glimmers as the sun shines on its wet surface and the sea sparkles. Seaweed floats past as we swim deeper into the cave and into the darkness.

An eerie quiet envelops us as the gentle lapping of the water on the cave wall is penetrated only by the occasional shriek of fear mixed with excitement. At the end of the cave, you can swim around a corner and exit the cave at a completely different point.

Kimmeridge Bay is a fantastic place to take the 'van. You'll drive along some winding country roads to get there and pass by a great





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SCAN ME

✓ TOP TIP

- Pay a visit to the mentioned museums for a more educational visit to Dorset's Jurassic Coast. Walking along Dorset's coast can be exhausting, so we always do it with a coffee or snack from the food places we mentioned

museum. Personally, the grassy clifftop car park is the highlight. This location is where I used to come to surf when the right conditions arose, but, more recently, it has become the spot where I come to park the 'van and sit by it with a picnic or bbq.

I haven't surfed this spot since my friend moved away, but every time I come here, my mind takes me back to those moments when I was clumsily paddling onto the face of a wave before riding it parallel to the sheer cliff wall. My friend and I loved this surf spot for its wildness, and I have fond memories of us sat on our boards, bobbing up and down, and looking around to see nothing but sea and cliff face.

At low tide, long rocky peninsulas appear and are great fun to explore. You can go crabbing off these, look for fossils, or simply sit high above it all and watch the sun set dramatically behind the cliffs.

The next diamond on Dorset's Jurassic Coast is Winspit Quarry. I will start the day in Worth Matravers. There is no one thing that makes this place so special and I will describe how best I enjoy everything this place has to offer. First, I will park at the Worth Matravers car park by Woodhenge and amble through the streets lined with houses built using Purbeck stone.

Sometimes I'll walk up around the church to appreciate more of this historic town before I make my way



to the quaint little Worth Matravers Tea & Coffee Shop, where excellent coffee is served along with incredible home-made baked goods, and a lovely selection of locally sourced produce.

Afterwards, I will continue through the village green and to the path that leads down to the coast.

At Winspit, there are a few features of the old quarry, including some caves, which were used in one of the more recent Star Wars productions. Furthermore, this

ABOVE

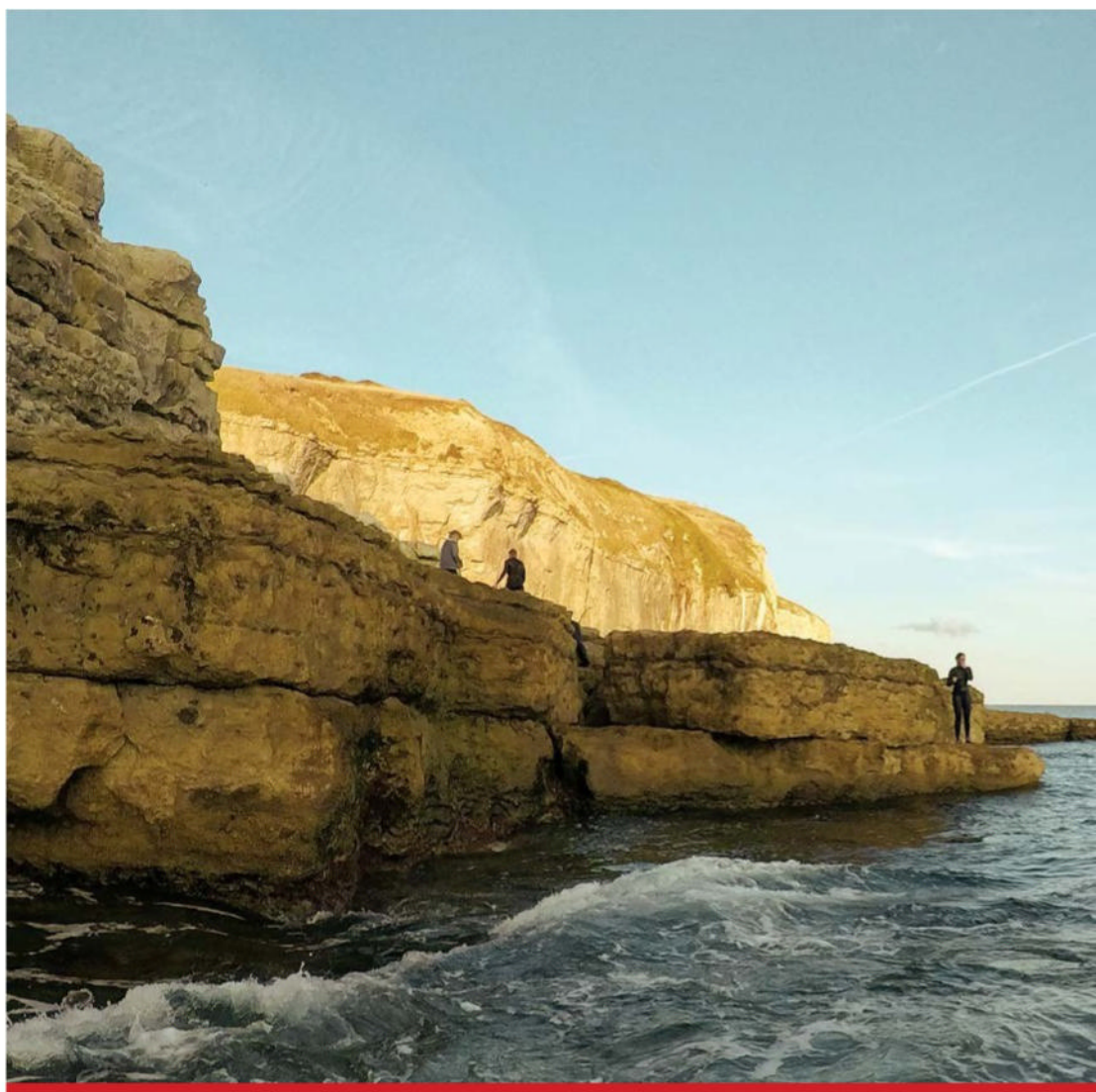
Cliff jumping at Dancing Ledge

INSET LEFT

Clambering down to our climbing spot at Portland

FAR RIGHT

The legendary Corfe Castle



quarry forms some of the climbing routes that are most enjoyed in this area. The climbing here is special thanks to the insane scenery surrounding you.

Climbing is often challenging, but the view from this amazing section of coastline is certainly a motivator.

If weather permits, and I'm not too tired from the climbing, we'll occasionally climb down the rocks to where it's possible to swim and snorkel. The conditions are not always right but, on occasion, the sea becomes crystal clear and there is a labyrinth of twisting rocks eroded by the sea's relentless movement, that are teeming with life. Gliding above this other world and watching life

ROAD TRIPS DORSET

**NOTHING COMPARES TO THE EXHILARATING
MOMENT AS YOU WAIT TO TAKE THAT FIRST
PLUNGE INTO THE OCEAN'S DEPTHS**



the local area.

Lulworth is probably Dorset's most well-known location thanks to the renowned Durdle Door, and you may also have heard of Lulworth Cove, too. You can learn about the formation of these geologically interesting locations in the free visitor centre in the centre of town, as well as places to eat and drink.

Outside of peak season (because peak season can get seriously busy), Lucy and I can either be found paddleboarding by Durdle Door, snorkelling on Man O'War Beach, bouldering with our friends or hiking. One of my favourite hikes begins at Lulworth Cove and goes to Mupe Bay, which is another stunning stretch of Dorset's coast.

Portland has become one of our most visited locations on Dorset's coast due to the huge number of climbing and bouldering routes available. The unique road along

Chesil Beach never fails to excite me as we approach, and I feel thankful to have this spot on our doorstep. On a sunny day, Portland can feel almost Mediterranean as the sparkling blue water laps at the rugged coastline.

A lot of the climbing spots are accessed by clambering down metal rungs that have been embedded in the cliff faces, and so the non-climber might not know these places exist, which leads to a feeling of being somewhere undiscovered. Many of the spots here offer easy access to the sea where, after a hot day of climbing, we would take a brisk dip. After a day out on



OUR 'VAN

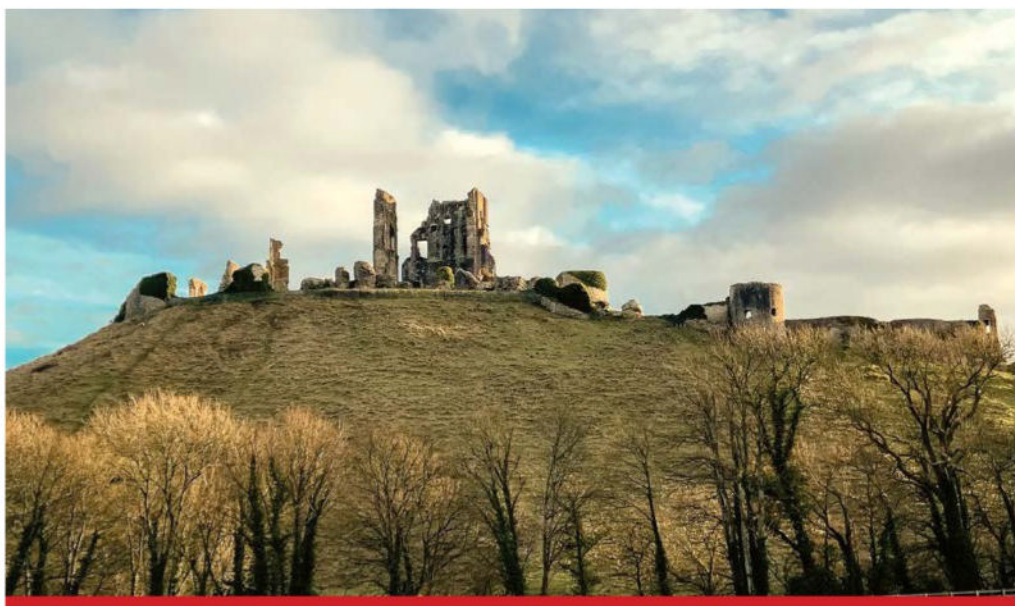
A 1997 VW Transporter that was converted into a campervan on a tight budget using pallet wood from nearby farms. As you can probably tell, our campervan is hand-painted and lifted, giving her a rather unique look



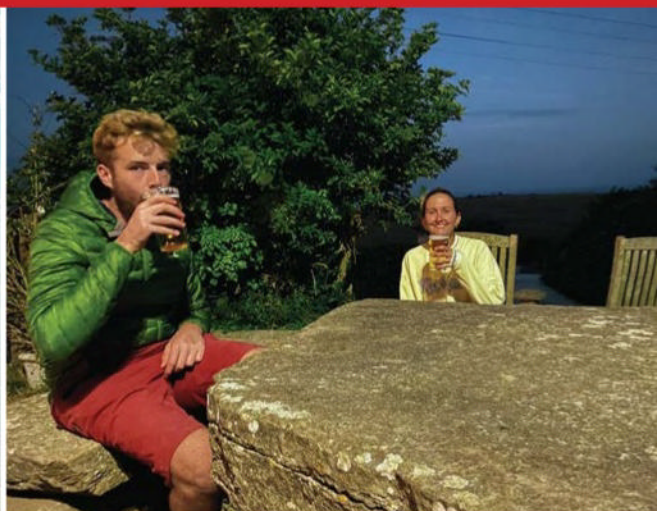
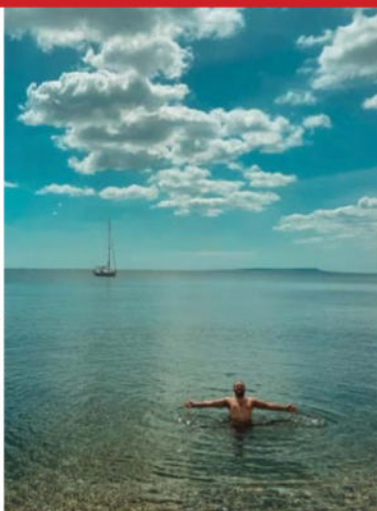
unfold is one of the most mesmerising and therapeutic things I've ever done.

Once the cold finally sets in, and Lucy drags me from the depths of the ocean, we set off up the steep hill back to Worth Matravers, where we head to the infamous Square and Compass. This pub has an almost medieval feel to it which I love.

Once we've ordered our pints and pasties, we make our way out to one of the huge stone tables outside to sit and watch the sunset. Sometimes we might be treated to a band playing in the pub's tiny interior as the fire roars behind them. And, as if that wasn't enough, the pub's small fossil museum displays a collection from



ROAD TRIPS DORSET



Portland, I always feel my adventurous tendencies have been fully indulged.

Last, but not least, is Tynemouth. The area can be enjoyed in several ways, and it is my favourite spot. The 'van can be parked in one of two places, depending on the activity of the day. There is a huge ridge that lies across the Isle of Purbeck, and it is this ridge that Corfe Castle hides within, as does the starting point of my favourite hike. The Whiteway's Viewpoint car park offers panoramic views of the entire area.

From here you walk along the

ABOVE LEFT

Lucy walking at Kimmeridge Bay

Me enjoying a swim at Tynemouth

Tom and Lucy having a pint at the Square and Compass pub

INSET

Lucy paddleboarding by Durdle Door

INSET

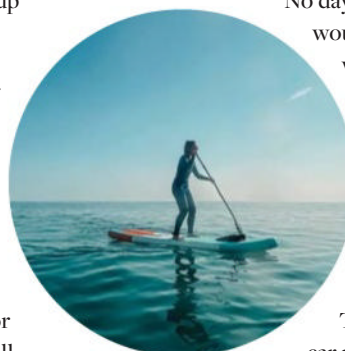
Sunset after a long day's climbing at Winspit

ridge and to Flower's Barrow where you'll find the most incredible view of Worbarrow Bay and Tout. You can then drop down into the bay at this point and cut back up through the woods.

Alternatively, climb the steep cliff on the other side of the bay and walk towards Tynemouth Cap. From there, climb to the top of Worbarrow Tout for more great views. All

routes end up in Tynemouth village, an incredible place where you can really step back in time and learn what life was once like.

No day out to Tynemouth would be complete without an après paddleboard coffee or a mid-hike rejuvenation at The Forgotten Salt Pig, which is a wonderful coffee van situated in Tynemouth's main car park.



WHERE TO STAY

TOM'S FIELD

Langton Matravers, Swanage, Dorset BH19 3HN

Wtomsfieldcamping.co.uk

WOODYHYDE CAMPSITE

Corfe Castle, Dorset BH20 5HT

Wwoodyhyde.co.uk



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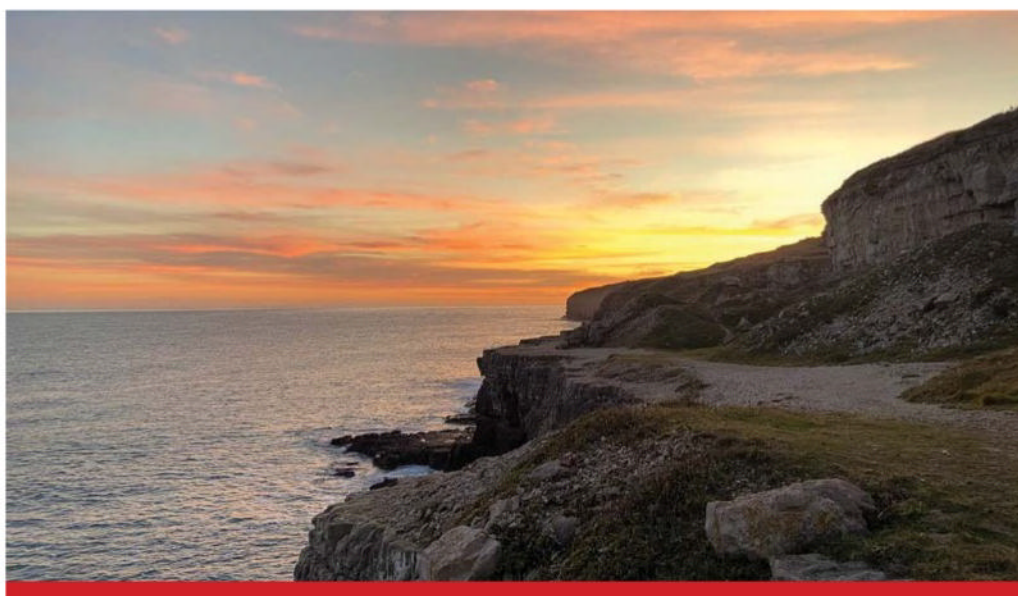
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ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

A massive campervan exploration of the west of France

Of all the reasons for a delay at a ferry port check-in, a World War II half-track troop carrier being abandoned at the booth is one of the rarer ones. It was the eightieth anniversary of the D-Day landings and at Portsmouth, the Ouistreham lane had campervans mixed with Jeeps and armoured cars.

This 2,850-mile trip was to take us

around west-central and central France in 44 days. If I were to isolate a couple of themes emerging from the journey, they might be unseasonal weather, which the French were disgruntled with, and the serendipitous delights discovered in two towns in particular: Aubusson and St Rémy-sur-Orne.

From Ouistreham we drove via a short stop at Domfront to Lassay-les

MAIN PHOTO

Château de Terre Neuve at Fontenay le Comte

Châteaux in the Mayenne department, a small, low-key provincial town around 95km (60 miles) due south of Caen. It had three châteaux and three aires! Two were full and the third, at the north end of the town by the brand-new post office, was deserted. It was deserted because the roads and pavements around it were being renovated and resurfaced.

ROAD TRIPS FRANCE

Past experience told us that the workers would be there at 8.30am and gone by 5pm (we were out most of the day anyway) and it was in a shady grassed area with a public toilet nearby.

This town contained the first château visit of our trip. The castle in the town was the most complete example – quite small grounds but sumptuous. Timed, guided visits only here, but we got a guide to ourselves, a student *en vacance* from his dissertation year at Laval. The second day we did an 8km (five-mile) walk through the surrounding fields, where we saw dozens of butterflies but no other ramblers.

Vitré campsite was our next stop and it was a delight. It was created on an old shooting range, but now peace and tranquillity reign. Lots of secluded bits, separated by high stone walls and good facilities. Just next door is the civic swimming pool and a supermarket a five-minute walk away. A recommended place for French tourers.

We stayed one more day in this town, wandering around and lunching on crêpes and galettes. Our policy on this trip was to do two and three-day stopovers at various points as a buffer to the more “rushed” trips of the past. It served well – more time to explore, sometimes unearthing things not in the main guide books.

The word “*périphérique*” on a road sign has terrifying memories, having endured the Paris Périphérique years ago in a car. However, the Nantes Périphérique was a cinch by comparison. It was part of the journey to a completely different style of campsite at Lac de Grand-Lieu, a large area of wetland

southwest of Nantes. We discovered an aire near St-Lumine-de-Coutais, this aire was really a wide grass verge with picnic tables and a compost toilet. It was quiet, in a very rural area and just a perfect spot.

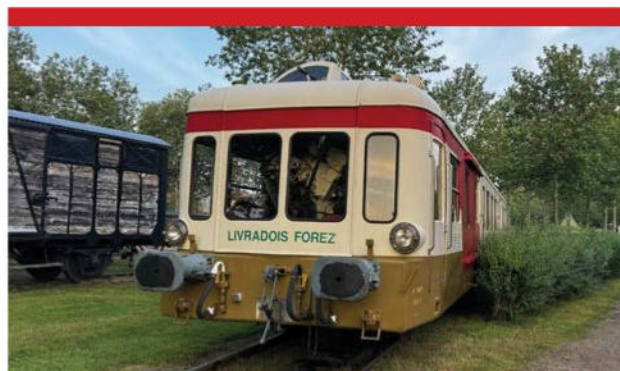
Our stay coincided with the water level in the wetland starting to drop – it floods in winter.

The next day my wife took a bike ride, while a tyre problem with my own cycle (and being delightfully, but inconveniently, out in the sticks) imposed a rest day for me. So, next day we drove around her circular route, stopping at Passay, *village de pêcheurs* (village of the fishermen). It's home to one of those well-kept, well-funded museums, the Maison des Pêcheurs. This site has a tower to look out over the wetland and nicely presented local history and even fish in tanks. A top tip here is to get Le Pass which will get you a stamp and a price reduction at five sites in the area. There is a small parking-only aire in this village, which looks OK for overnighting.

At Fontenay-le-Comte another happy discovery – the ticket machine for the aire was broken so the barrier was open and the electricity was free. *La belle France!* It was close to the town centre, but there was little to see in this area so we headed through the rugged gardens of the Parc Baron to Château de Terre-Neuve, 15 minutes away from the aire. A guided tour for €10 took us through this small, fascinating building. Small, but full of stuff from other châteaux! There was a gold-painted sun wall motif from the château at Chambord.

On our way to Jarnac we stopped at Saint-Jean-d'Angély, a town on the right bank of the River Boutonne. It was there that we experienced a campervanners' event that had only happened once before: we couldn't remember where we had parked it. We walked off most of lunch circling the town for 35 minutes.

Jarnac is twinned with nearby Cognac in tourist literature and the regional mindset. The campsite is



MAIN PHOTO

Heritage train at Ambert

BELOW

The aire at St-Lumine-de-Coutais was a grass verge with a compost toilet and water

south of the town, just across the Charente. A neat, clean site with a very vigilant warden, always on the lookout for stray campers from the nearby aire using the facilities.

There is much to see. It has a charming riverside and many of the big cognac houses are here: Hine, Courvoisier and others. It is also the birthplace of François Mitterrand, French President from 1981-95 – and his small and intimate home is open for visitors.

You meet people, often in the street, for short passing-the-time-of-day conversations on holiday as you would at home. I often use rain as an opening gambit and there was a lot of it on this French holiday. I try to engage my interlocutor by calling it “like an English summer”, which often amuses. In Jarnac we had a café conversation: culture, politics, Europe, cognac and more. The town has a stark, unusual church – St-Pierre

MY 'VAN

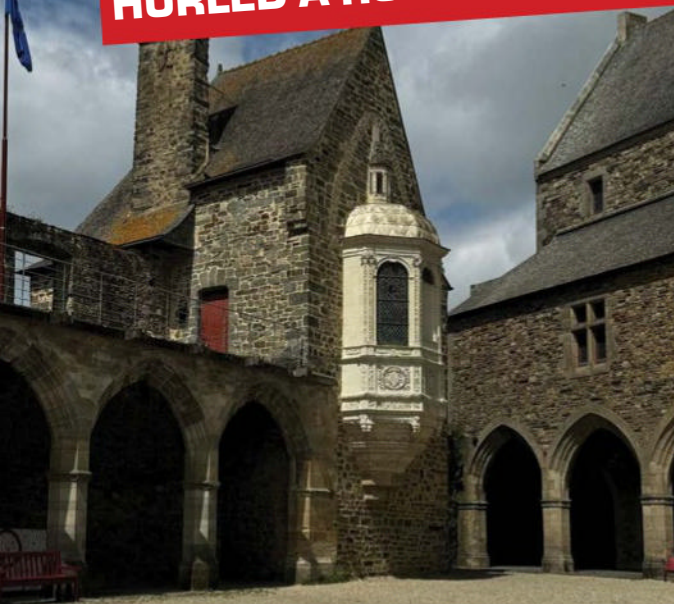
Jonathan Hauxwell is a retired university teacher, who has, since 2014, toured western Europe with his wife, Melanie, in their 2014 Devon Sahara campervan (2.3-litre diesel Fiat Ducato)



✓ TOP TIP

- If you are going to watch 14 July events get there early, especially for firework displays

CASTELNAUD IS A SMALL REBUILT FORTRESS WITH THE CHANCE TO WATCH A TREBUCHET DEMONSTRATION THAT HURLED A RUCKSACK ACROSS THE MOAT



– virtually a one-room edifice; which in the United Kingdom would be called a hall church.

It was then east to Brantôme, but with a stop at Angoulême. Most of the centre of this small city lies on a terrace overlooking the Charente river, hence its nickname, the balcony of the southwest. A balcony

sweetened by the dizzying perfume of star jasmine that wafted over us throughout the city. Not only the plants but the plant-based wooed us. At the restaurant Le Lieu-Dit on the Rue de Genève, hand-pressed lentil burgers and perfect frites with mayo and garlic butter on the bun stapled the city in the memory – and so did the giant murals of comic characters painted on several gable ends. Angoulême has an annual comic festival, too.

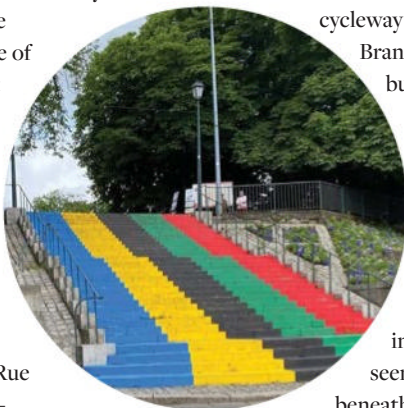
We were now in the Dordogne, a place in tourist mythology that is

loved and lived in by the British. We camped on a riverside site by the eponymous river; it was busy but well supplied with hedges and trees around the plots for privacy. As a reminder of the poor weather of the spring, some of the plots were very damp, and avoided by new arrivals.

A short walk along a footpath/cycleway takes you into Brantôme town – small, busy and encircled by the Dordogne and a medieval canal, making it an island.

The main attraction is the *abbaye*, built partly into the hillside. It seems squeezed in beneath the river cliff; the site restriction makes it all the more interesting as a building. This wasn't a great town for vegetarians so we took a picnic into the Jardin des Moines opposite the abbey. Predictably, it rained later.

Some little villages make you feel like you're having a hyper-reality walk through a Disney set – Château



ABOVE LEFT

Vitré, 40km east of Rennes, showing off a beautiful oriel window in lighter stone

ABOVE

Château de Castelnaud under those darkening skies

INSET

Olympic colours on stairs at the top of the main street, Fontenay-Le-Comte

Bourdeilles was not one of these; it was beautiful, but liveable-in beautiful. It has a rarity, a double château, medieval and Renaissance side by side.

We parked the bikes and ate outside a café there, the dream only partially disrupted by large *camións* (trucks) rumbling by and making my crêpe quiver.

The next day was our wedding anniversary and, as we parked in a suburb of Périgueux, we vowed not to forget where we left it this time. So, coordinates mapped, pins dropped and street names photographed, it worked. Périgueux, capital of the Dordogne, is packed with things to see: extensive Roman remains, a good architectural load if that's your thing (it's mine). But we wanted a nice meal and in a side street we found Izba, a totally vegetarian restaurant with good beers, too. It has a daily limited and changing menu and the food was so very, very good.

Our next spot was at Camping La Plage, close, very close, to the swollen Dordogne. It's a good centre for a few days. We walked west across fields from the campsite to Castelnaud, a



small rebuilt fortress with the chance to watch a trebuchet demonstration that hurled a rucksack across the moat for our delectation. Back across the fields to Château de Marqueyssac perched on a ridge high above the river – it's a steep, short climb but there is quite a panorama of that section of the river. More interesting is the funky shrubbery around the house – irregularly placed asymmetrical topiary. The next day was cold and wet.

Ambert was a recommended destination in the Puy-de-Dôme region and the easternmost point on our trip. There was a lot going on; it was moto weekend (a motorcycle event) at the end of June, so lots of young people and a big day out for the townspeople, too. The site manager told us it would be noisy for a while, but it was not an issue. The site was compact with good hedge privacy lines and footpath access to the town. It bustled with a young social crowd who did not object to “seniors” squeezing into their courtyards and bars.

Fourme d'Ambert is a creamy blue cheese and Ambert has the cheese

museum to go with it! It has historic trains, too, strange wide, flat vehicles that run north and south for tourists.

Aubusson site was a quiet car park aire about 500 metres above the town to the east, with a working service point. The town was a target because of its tapestry collections; it had a carpet museum and a tapestry “cartoon” (design blueprint) museum, too. The main attraction was the exhibition of designs based on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. I have no real interest in this artform, but this collection was a real tour de force – the pieces are massive and highly coloured.

We headed to the northwest next to get us in line for the run back to the ferry, and so to Bourges. It's what geographers call a “central place” in the spatial theory of how settlements evolve. It is the stellate focus for roads from all directions.

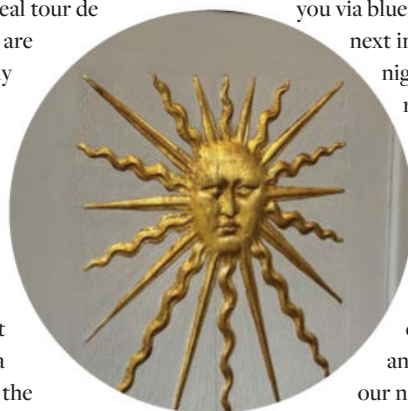
Our campsite was south of the city

and has a tricky entrance – you can't directly turn left into it, you must use a light-controlled road loop for access. It was a small and well-managed site with privacy hedges and a nearby mainly traffic-free path through parkland to the city centre.

We struck lucky; it was their *Nuits Lumière* season and it was an event that occupied not just the main square, but spanned the labyrinth of narrow streets. Seven large projections were signposted by Ursine the bear, whose projection led you via blue guide lights to the

next image on our hot night with patchy rain. Very impressive and it's every evening in June and July. There was more light (albeit a bit more explosive light) and celebration at our next stop, Blois.

The campsite was on the riverbank about two miles east of the city and linked to a cycle track beside the Loire that has lateral loops on



TOP

The Gallo-Roman tower at Versunna, nearly 30 metres high

TOP RIGHT

Funky topiary at Château Marqueyssac – Les Jardins Suspendus.

INSET

Château de Nova Terre is full of little decorative gems like this

ROAD TRIPS FRANCE



quiet roads. We used the Komoot app to navigate one of these. It was a big grassy location with some open stretches and some hedges. The staff were attentive and knowledgeable and the facilities were good.

The cycle route we chose was to Château Chambord, a circular route of 25 miles from Blois (a little less from the campsite). The château is a popular and very sumptuous edifice, loaded down with architectural detail. It has the usual craft-orientated “village”, but it’s quite nicely done. From every angle the château reeks of riches and privilege. As we cycled home, I had to remark, “It’s no wonder they had a revolution”.

We had landed in Blois in time for the *quatorze Juillet* celebrations – Bastille Day – a bit more of a secular indulgence than life at Chambord! The city celebrated it actually on the thirteenth, but I understand that adjacent communes negotiate so that events don’t clash. The daylight

activity involves parades of dignitaries, police, fire brigade, plus all their shining vehicles, but at night the fireworks lit up a crowd of thousands focused around the Jacques-Gabriel Bridge. We managed to get a spot right in the middle of it, but you have to be in place just before dusk to get a good spot. Throbbing away on the south bank was the band, No Limits, with their own light show. The fireworks were a delight and lasted about 30 minutes. We had walked in along the riverside track, so we got back to the ‘van just after midnight as the smoke and fumes of fireworks were just drifting off the Loire.

As a footnote, we revisited a Blois eatery that we used two years ago, Le FaB – it stands for Food and Brew – on the Rue du Poids du Roi. On the day of the celebrations it was lively and noisy and friendly, good for vegetarian food and it serves my favourite Trappist beer, Orval.

The last lap was to include a stop at St Rémy-sur-Orne, about 32 miles southwest of Caen. It was another minor serendipity. The place was one of those en route small towns that occupy both sides of a main road – pale-coloured houses, a shop or two, then gone. St Rémy had something of the post-industrial about it. The aire was behind the main street; it was quite new, free and tidy but the

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT

Bourges Cathedral, where flying buttresses transfer thrust from the roof to the ground like medieval Meccano

A medieval house in Périgueux designed to be above flood waters and supervise a toll bridge opposite

Lac de Grande Lieu. We got there just as the] seasonal water level was receding and the clouds were gathering!

BELOW

Saint-Rémy. Also behind the trees, this way to the cycle network, bivouac and café

service point rejected our card, though we coped. When you sit and look at it, the aire is in a small industrial estate with a linear layout, the layout was a remnant of a railway station and sidings. The old track was now a cycleway and footpath that linked into a massive cycle network, the Voie Verte de la Suisse Normande. St Remy had a bivouac area and café for long-distance cyclists alongside the track.

But there was more. At the north end of the aire, partially hidden in a clump of trees, were the giant rusting remains of a former iron mining and processing industry. Ore was mined here and roasted to reduce the weight of impurities before it was moved on by rail.

There was even more... as I looked with my binoculars at an unusual bird in the next compound, I noticed a bright sign in the distance – a microbrewery named La Lie (it means “the dregs”). With off-sales available, space was found in campervan cupboards. The hidden joys of the small aire.

Ouistreham was quiet and we parked up along the seafront road until the boarding time came around, no log jams from historic military vehicles, just extra time needed for sniffer-dog work and ‘van search. I hope it doesn’t go bonkers over that rich blue cheese from Ambert...

✓ TOP TIP

- If you are unsure about being able to park in towns and cities, park up on main roads in the suburbs and walk or take public transport



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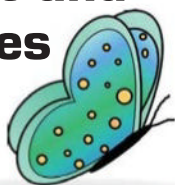




ART AT-TRACK

Words & pictures ■ Sue Phillips

A captivating trail of artist-designed seats inviting travellers to pause and soak in the picturesque Kent and Surrey landscapes



The North Downs Art Trail – otherwise known as the GREAT ARTdoors – is an initiative comprising nine seats, all designed by artists and installed along the North Downs Way in Kent and Surrey. Each seat provides a tempting invitation to pause, relax and enjoy the surrounding landscape.

In Kent, the trail follows the route of the Via Francigena – an ancient pilgrim route between Dover and Canterbury. During a previous trip we stayed at two campsites near six sculptures along the Kent stretch of the North Downs Way. That was nearly a year ago. We unfortunately

had to postpone our plans to explore the eastern end of the trail when Paul became ill. With his health improved, we had set our sights on the Surrey Hills Sculptures Art Trail.

However, our first destination was Farnham, a historic market town and the starting point of the North Downs Way. First off, we picked up a heritage trail map from the Tourist Information Centre.

Shortly after turning from South Street into The Borough, a tempting display of exquisitely crafted cakes in the Petite Patisserie caught our eye. We couldn't resist – what better start to our morning than freshly brewed coffee and a delicious Mayan

ROAD TRIPS NORTH DOWNS



chocolate tart?

Following the impromptu treat, we turned off The Borough into Castle Street, which slopes up towards the twelfth century Farnham Castle. This elegant Georgian road has more than one claim to fame.

Back in 1895, the first motoring offence to warrant a fine took place here. Inventor and engineer, John Henry Knight, designed one of Britain's first petrol-powered, two-person motor vehicles. He, along with his unfortunate assistant, James Pullinger, was subsequently prosecuted for driving it through Fareham with neither a licence nor a man walking in front with a red flag.

MAIN PICTURE
The North Downs Way

ABOVE RIGHT
The vineyards at
Denbies Wine Estate



The following century, in 1916, Castle Street saw the world's first two-minute silence, organised as a sign of respect for those caught up in WWI, and to raise funds for the British Red Cross.

Farnham Castle consists of a large circular stone keep alongside a collection of imposing buildings, including Bishop's Palace – regularly visited by a succession of monarchs. Elizabeth I came here at least six times. Indeed, in 1583, following rumours of a plot to kill her, the queen relocated to the castle for the summer along with her councillors and courtiers.

Our clamber up the steep, uneven stone steps to the top of the keep was rewarded with panoramic views over Bishop's Palace, Farnham, and the encircling countryside.

Returning back down Castle Street, we passed some pretty almshouses. A stone plaque explained that these were erected for 'the habitation and relief of eight poor, honest, old, impotent persons'.

A little further down the hill we turned right into Long Garden Walk; a lane once used for making rope. Ropemakers would have walked backwards along the alley, from the site of the Hop Blossom pub to the far side of Castle Street, twisting strands into standard lengths of rope

as they went.

Farnham has an extremely long history of craft and making. In fact, in 2020 it was designated as a World Craft Town, joining a worldwide network of craft cities and regions.

We particularly enjoyed visiting the New Ashgate Gallery, with two floors of paintings, prints, ceramics and jewellery by local and national artists. Then, a little further on, we stopped for lunch at Farnham Maltings – a cultural centre and theatre – where we found more jewellery displays and a small shop selling handcrafted items.

Our whistle-stop self-guided tour took us along narrow Church Passage, known as 'streaky bacon lane' partly due to the patterning of the paving blocks, but mainly as it was once the location of a bacon curing factory.

On the other side of St Andrew's Church, we entered Lower Church Lane, which has a gutter down the middle of the road. This was used as an overground sewer in Tudor times when households thought nothing of throwing the contents of their toilet pots from first floor windows into the street.

By mid-afternoon, we both agreed that a day wasn't nearly long enough to do this fascinating little town justice. However, we had to get to



THE RIVER TILLINGBOURNE WINDS THROUGH THE SITE, AND WE WERE DELIGHTED TO SPOT A STUNNING EMPEROR DRAGONFLY



i USEFUL INFO

• Track down the nine sculptures along the North Downs Trail
W kentdowns.org.uk/art-trail

Farnham's transformation into England's first World Craft Town
W farnhamcrafttown.com

A guide to exploring the Surrey Hills
W visitsurrey.com/explore/the-surrey-hills-aonb

our campsite, some 30 miles east of Farnham, by 6.30pm. Reluctantly we left, vowing to return in the future for a longer visit.

We'd booked a pitch at Henfold Lakes – a site largely geared towards fishing enthusiasts. The facilities were extremely basic, though clean. It wouldn't suit everyone, but we loved it.

Our lakeside pitch had a great view of a grey heron standing, almost motionless, in the centre of the water. Later, we spotted a treecreeper with its distinctive flight pattern, spiralling up each tree trunk then flying diagonally down to the base of the next tree.

The following morning we set off to visit the first sculpture on our itinerary. *Optohedron* is situated around 13 miles west of Henfold Lakes, and just a short stroll from

Newlands Corner.

As we pulled into the car park, we were surprised how busy it was. Newlands Corner acquired some notoriety in 1926; the detective writer, Agatha Christie, disappeared for 11 days when her car was found in a hedge close to the hilltop beauty spot. These days it's clearly a popular destination for ramblers, dog walkers, cyclists and bikers.

We crossed the A25 to join the North Downs Way and walked a short distance to the sculpture – situated just off the main path, with views through a gap in the trees to the woods and fields beyond. The design of the hammock-shaped seat takes inspiration from the faceted structure of an insect's eye. In fact, the name *Optohedron* combines the ancient Greek words for a raised seat and seeing.

ABOVE

The River Tillingbourne runs through the middle of Chilworth Gunpowder Mills

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT

A cheerful flower display outside Farnham's Tourist Information Centre

Rows of grape vines at Denbies Wine Estate

Pausing to admire the view, we got chatting to some fellow visitors, locals who suggested that we pay a visit to Chilworth Gunpowder Mills and St Martha's Church. But first we drove a little further along the A25 to the Silent Pool.

When Agatha Christie disappeared from Newlands Corner, a hoax letter led some people to wonder if she had drowned here, since her husband was having an affair with a woman from a nearby village. As it happens, the novelist was later found alive and well in Harrogate. However, according to local folklore, a woodcutter's daughter who drowned, in the Middle Ages, when she was caught bathing and pursued into deeper water by King John now haunts the pond.

Following the advice of the locals we'd met, we drove to Chilworth and parked outside the infants school.



ROAD TRIPS NORTH DOWNS



From here, we followed Vera's Path to Chilworth Gunpowder Mills. Once a thriving industrial site, it's now managed as a nature reserve.

One visitor wrote that, "The place still faintly tingles with the dangerous energy of the explosive industry." We perfectly understood what they meant. The River Tillingbourne winds through the site, and we were delighted to spot a stunning emperor dragonfly darting along the path in front of us.

At the far end we exited the nature reserve onto the Downs Link path. When we reached Chilworth Manor, the footpath started to incline upwards. Paul took an alternative route through vineyards back to the 'van, while I continued on to St Martha-on-the-Hill.

The path was much steeper than I expected, and I was out of breath once I'd scrambled to the top but spectacular views certainly made the climb worthwhile.

Although the church is only accessible by foot, I subsequently discovered that there are less strenuous footpaths up to the church from free car parks on either side of the hill – Guildford Lane and Halfpenny Lane.

Originally St Martha-on-the-Hill

had a tall tower that would have been visible from many miles away. But, in 1745, several accidental blasts in the gunpowder works tucked into the hillside below this hilltop church caused the tower to crash to the ground.

Our second sculpture, *Radius*, is just five miles north of Henfold Lakes, in the grounds of Denbies Wine Estate.

On arrival it was apparent that this is a large and varied enterprise, with people queuing for miniature train trips around the vineyards, and a busy shop and café, not to mention the Surrey Beekeepers Association annual honey show.

We couldn't resist buying a couple of jars of local honey, and a few bottles of wine, before making our way upwards through the vineyards. At the top end of the lane, we picked up the North Downs Way again, following the trail along the ridge. On each side of the path, tall slender tree trunks were silhouetted against the pale green, yet translucent sunlit leaves. The undulating curves of the *Radius* seat orient the eye towards the vineyards below.

We stood to read poems by regional poets, and messages from local residents, carved into the tall

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT

The two-tone *Coccolith* sculpture in Clarks Lane Farm, on the North Downs Way

Botley Hill Farmhouse

The Petite Patisserie in Farnham

oak slats.

"The earth has music for those who listen."

"Never stop dreaming. Let magical moments guide you."

We'd timed our visit to this particular sculpture inspired by the promise of a pop-up wine tasting and stone-baked pizza on the lawn.

We anticipated a grass lawn with a view over rows of grape vines. However, on discovering that the lawn was plastic and overlooked the car park, we decided to head elsewhere for lunch.

With picnic provisions in the 'van, we set off for Box Hill Stepping

MY 'VAN

Our 2020 VW California Ocean T6.1 is our second ex-demo California. We love the clever detailing; it's a compact and perfect holiday home on wheels



ROAD TRIPS NORTH DOWNS



Stones, where the North Downs Way crosses the River Mole. When we left the campsite earlier that day, the wardens told us we'd be lucky to find a parking space in the small car park on a sunny Sunday.

Luckily, a car was leaving just as we arrived, so we eased into their spot. We grabbed a 99 cone each from the Mr Whippy van at the edge of the car park, and followed the signs down to the river.

A series of walkers, tourists and local families made their way – with varying degrees of confidence – across the hexagonal

stepping stones protruding from the water. Our turn. Once on the other side, Paul took the turning to a footbridge a little further along the river. And, being a sucker for punishment, I continued along 275 steps up, through steeply sloping yew woods, to another hilltop viewpoint.

The third sculpture on this section of the North Downs Way, *Coccolith*, is in Tatsfield, around 20 miles east of Henfold Lakes. We parked in the car park outside the Titsey Brewing Company & Taproom, and crossed the B2024 to where the sculpture is located in a field in Clarks Lane Farm. Clearly a lot of other people had the same idea as a steady trickle of people were headed in the same direction, some of them carrying a glass of beer from the taproom.

The word coccolith was new to us. Apparently, between 65 and 100 million years ago, the Surrey Hills lay under a warm sea, and the chalk

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT

The Surrey Beekeepers Association annual honey show

Church Passage in Farnham, AKA 'streaky bacon lane'

Box Hill Stepping Stones, where the North Downs Way crosses the River Mole

INSET

Handmade crafts for sale in Farnham Maltings

of the North Downs was formed from skeletal remains (coccoliths) of minute, single-celled, marine phytoplankton known as coccolithophores.

The sculpture takes the form of a circular dry stone wall, with the appearance of an upmarket sheep pen. Narrow slabs of chalk line the inside of the structure, and the outside was constructed using red ironstone rock (from the nearby Moorhouse Sandpits quarry), giving it a dramatic two-tone appearance. Five cantilevered bench seats face a gap in the wall through which you can enjoy a rather lovely view of the Kent and Surrey countryside.

Heading back to the brewery, we picked up a few bottles for later. From here, we drove on to nearby Botley Hill Farmhouse, situated at the highest point of the North Downs Way. Inside the bar, we noticed that the pub sells beer from the Titsey Brewing Company we'd just visited.

Outside, our picnic table provided another panoramic view over the Surrey Hills. Yet, when we checked our route home, we were surprised to realise that the pub is just a 40-minute drive from our home in south London.



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Words Claire Tupholme



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W broadhembury.co.uk

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Producing an award-winning range of wines, Chapel Down winery estate near Tenterden is open to the public for guided tours. With something for everyone you could choose a cheese and wine tour, a vineyard tour and afternoon tea, or just enjoy some wine tasting.

There's even a two AA Rosette restaurant, The Swan, on the estate where you can enjoy regionally sourced produce or treat yourself and book a dining experience which can also include a vineyard tour.

A 30-minute drive away from Chapel Down is Broadhembury Caravan and Camping Park. We'd suggest the bus or taxi if both of you like a tipple or two.

Comprising of a tranquil adults-only meadow touring area, and a family park with easy access to the play area and games

room, this site caters for all. Facilities on site include toilets and showers, a launderette, and accessible facilities.



Chapel Down Winery



Michael/Pixabay

THE PADDOCKS TOURING PARK

Ingliston Estate & Country Club, Old Greenock Road, Bishopton, Renfrewshire PA7 5PA

T 01505 864333

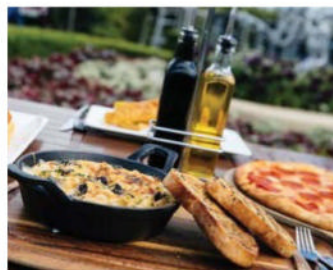
W thepaddocksrv.com

OPEN All year

Originally established as an equestrian centre, the 100-acre Ingliston Estate is home to luxury site, The Paddocks. There are 30 hardstanding pitches, with an area also suitable for RVs, and you can choose pitches with electric and water hook-up or 'dry' pitches with no hook-ups. Facilities include toilets, showers, a laundry room, play area and WiFi.

The star of the show is Palomino's, the country club's award-winning restaurant and cocktail bar, offering sit-in, al fresco dining and takeaway dining delivered to your pitch. The restaurant offers views of Ingliston's international indoor horse arena for a unique dining experience.

The Paddocks is situated between Loch Lomond and Glasgow city centre, and is ideal for visiting the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. You can even enhance your stay with a stable tour, pony walks or champagne upon arrival.



ROAD TRIPS CAMPSITES

THE INSIDE PARK

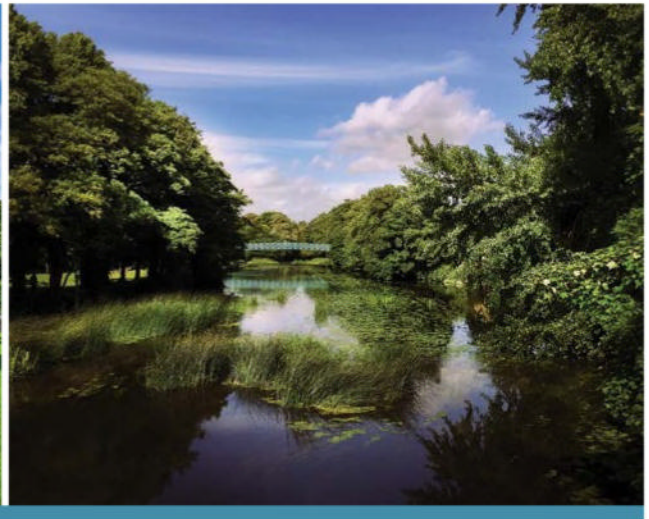
Fairmile Road, Blandford, Dorset DT11 9AD **T** 01258 453719 **W** theinsidepark.co.uk **OPEN** 1 April – 31 October

Located in the Dorset village of Blandford St Mary, Badger Brewery first started brewing in 1777. Alongside the River Stour, a state-of-the-art brewery is now housed next to the old brewery buildings where guests can enjoy a brewery tour or sample the beer and food in the Brewery Tap pub and restaurant.

For somewhere nearby to stay The Inside Park is one and a half miles away. There's no path on the road so we would advise getting a taxi, but then you can enjoy a few beers. Those with a lower

campervan can park at Stour Meadows Car Park (DT11 9LS) behind the brewery; the car park has a 2.10m height restriction. The Meadows offer a relaxing place to take a walk alongside the river and to the remains of an old viaduct.

The Inside Park offers lots of green open space, encircled by trees, and five miles of marked walking/cycling routes. There are grass pitches with electric hook-up and the usual facilities are housed in the eighteenth century stables.



Linda Cooke/Shutterstock

WHITEHILL COUNTRY PARK

Stoke Road, Paignton, Devon TQ4 7PF

T 01803 782338

W whitehill-park.co.uk

OPEN 10 February – 29 October

Sandridge Barton is the home of Sharpham Wine, a company that has been producing wine in Devon's Dart Valley for over 40 years. There are vineyards, a winery and visitor centre and you can enjoy several types of tour, ranging from self-guided options and wine tasting to a vineyard safari giving a full insight into wine production. Also located at the winery is Circa, a small-plates and sharing restaurant, beautifully housed inside the old stone milking parlour.

Just one mile away, in an idyllic countryside location, is Whitehill Country Park. This site has an indoor and outdoor pool, walking trails through bluebell woodland, a bar and restaurant, a dog exercise paddock and a children's craft centre. Pitches are available on grass or hardstanding, with electric hook-up or fully serviced. There are toilets, showers, a family bathroom, dishwashing stations and a dog shower available.



marcoesselier.com

marcoesselier.com

ROAD TRIPS CAMPSITES



BATEMANS CAMPSITE

Salem Bridge Brewery, Mill Lane, Wainfleet,
Lincolnshire PE24 4JE

T 01754 880317

W batemansbrewery.co.uk

OPEN 15 March – 31 October

On the outskirts of the market town of Wainfleet All Saints is Batemans Brewery. The brewery also operates a campsite which overlooks the River Steeping. There are 19 grass pitches with electric hook-up available, with toilets and showers, a picnic area, and dogs are welcome.

Guests on site can take advantage of the brewery shop and discounted tours of the brewery. The beers have been brewed at this location since 1874 and you can venture behind the scenes to learn about four generations of brewing history. The tours culminate in ample sampling opportunities – ideal then that your pitch is only a short walk (or stagger) away!

A train station is five minutes' walk away, along with local shops, pubs and restaurants. The coast at Skegness is only six miles away and it's just a 20-minute drive to the Lincolnshire Wolds.

WILCOCKS FARM CARAVAN SITE

Dean Head Lane, Rivington, Bolton, Lancashire BL6 7SJ

T 01204 697339

W wilcocksfarm.co.uk

OPEN 1 March – 31 October

On the edge of the Pennines, Wilcocks Farm is near the village of Rivington between the country park and a set of pretty reservoirs. Rivington Pinetum and Terraced Gardens are also close by. This working farm site is home to sheep, cattle, hens and pygmy goats. Views from the site lead onto Winter Hill and Horwich village is five minutes away with shops, restaurants and a leisure centre. Middlebrook Retail Park is less than 10 minutes away, plus Bolton, Chorley and Wigan are all within 20 minutes' drive.

Just one and a half miles away, alongside Lower Rivington Reservoir, is Rivington Brewing Co, a craft brewery and tap room, with various seasonal events and serving food from visiting local vendors.

The campsite at Wilcocks Farm has 22 hardstanding pitches with electric hook-up. There is a toilet and shower block, family rooms and a pot wash area.



EYE KETTLEBY LAKES HOLIDAY PARK

Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE14 2TN

T 01664 565900

W eyekettlebylakes.com

OPEN All year



The Hanwell Wine Estate is set in the Nottinghamshire countryside, easily accessed just off the A606 near the village of Hickling Pastures. Offering more than just vineyard tours and tastings (Friday to Sunday only), the estate also has a café bar (open May to September), and a host of craft events on weekends throughout the year. These include jewellery making, glass painting and chocolate making workshops.

The estate does also have its own basic campsite from June to September, a grass paddock with a few hardstanding pitches and toilets but no showers. For somewhere with more in the way of facilities, and open all year, we would choose Eye Kettleby Lakes which is



just a 20-minute drive away. On this adults-only site you will find fully serviced pitches, deluxe amenities, a bar, tea room and shop. There are also eight fishing lakes.

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ROAD TRIPS CAMPSITES

FORD BRIDGE CAMPSITE

Cornhill-on-Tweed, Northumberland TD12 4TQ

T 07825 001425 W fordbridgecampsite.co.uk OPEN 1 April – 31 October

Sample quality cask Northumberland ales at the Cheviot Brewery – a microbrewery and tap bar producing award-winning ales. Pre-booked brewery tours are available on Fridays and Saturdays and the woodside tap bar serves wood-fired pizzas on Friday and Saturday evenings from April.

Cheviot Brewery also owns and runs The Black Bull in Etal village, the only thatched pub in Northumberland. While in Etal you can explore the ruins of Etal Castle and hop on a steam train for a ride on the Heatherslaw Light Railway.

Less than three miles from the brewery is Ford Bridge Campsite. This is a small site, with 15 pitches, some fully serviced hardstandings and others grass with electric. There are views to the Cheviot Hills and the site is central for visiting the towns of



Gail Johnson/stock.dobe.com

Wooler, Berwick and Kelso. Site facilities include toilets and covered pot washing. There is one free, portable electric shower, for those without their own facilities.

PublicDomainPictures/Pixabay



Yorkshire Heart

YORKSHIRE HEART

Pool Lane, Nun Monkton, York YO26 8EL

T 01423 330716 W yorkshireheart.com OPEN April – September

As the name might suggest, Yorkshire Heart is a family-run and award-winning brewery and vineyard in the heart of Yorkshire. The company is based between York and Harrogate with over 22,000 vines used to produce a variety of wines, and craft beers have been produced since 2011. There are a variety of tours, including brewery tours and beer tasting, or vineyard tours with a light lunch or afternoon tea included. There are even packages that include overnight stays on the campsite, a vineyard tour, lunch and an acoustic music night!

The campsite at Yorkshire Heart is located next to the vineyard and has 10 pitches. There is no electric hook-up but there are toilet and shower facilities, plus a washing-up sink. There is also the on-site Winehouse Café serving breakfasts and light lunches, with indoor and outdoor seating.



PENTEWAN SANDS

Pentewan, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 6BT

T 01726 843485

W pentewan.co.uk

OPEN 24 March – 28 October

For a selection of places to eat on site, and a varied menu to satisfy even the fussiest of eaters, head for Pentewan Sands in Cornwall. Firstly, there's The Seahorse, a restaurant, bar and café with an al fresco terrace with views over Mevagissey Bay.

The second is the Hubbox beach shack. The Hub Box brand has restaurants in Devon and Cornwall, including at Pentewan Sands. Set on the beach, the menu here includes handmade burgers, gourmet hot dogs and other barbecue specials slow smoked over hickory wood chips. There's also a fish and chip shop and a supermarket, too.

Pentewan Sands is right on the beach and the pitches closest to the sand get snapped up quickly, so make sure you book early. Facilities on site include two indoor pools, a whirlpool bath, tennis courts, and watersports.

CORNWALL



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MEET THE OWNERS



Golden Square is a five-star rated holiday park located in the stunning North York Moors National Park, offering a peaceful and family-friendly getaway. The park's unique layout across three levels provides spacious and private pitches, with trees and hedges strategically placed to enhance privacy. Guests can enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding farmland, forests and moorlands.

Families will love the variety of activities, including two outdoor play areas, an indoor play space, crazy golf and a football field, ensuring children have plenty to do. The park is an ideal base for exploring nearby scenic walking trails and local attractions, making it perfect for a relaxing break in nature.

We found out more about the site and its history from the owner, Barbara Armstrong.

How long have you been running your campsite?

As it is a family-run park and my parents developed the park I have always worked there helping out. I took over doing the main running of the park six years ago and my son is now involved, so it is a family affair.

Tell us a little about your site and how it first began?

My parents, Don and Barbara Armstrong, developed the park approximately 40 years

ago out of a piece of disused land on their farm. Years before, it had been a quarry, which was just overgrown with trees and bushes. This is why we have very good drainage, but you do need rock pegs if camping, due to the rocks beneath the surface.

What did you do before becoming the owners of this site?

When growing up I helped out on the farm, then the caravan park, then I was a baker at a local shop in Helmsley. Once I had children, I





WE ARE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE SURROUNDED BY FIELDS AND VIEWS LOOKING ACROSS TO THE HEART OF THE YORKSHIRE MOORS

And then, of course, cleaning the facilities, ordering stock, office work and more.

What do you feel makes your site special?

The site is laid out on different levels so even when full there is always a feeling of freedom. The views looking across to the North Yorkshire Moors are spectacular and we are a great park for family holidays, including two outdoor play areas and a football pitch.

What do you love about the region your site is based in?

We are in the countryside surrounded by fields and woods with views looking across to the heart of the North Yorkshire Moors, Heartbeat country. James Herriot described the panorama from nearby Sutton Bank as England's finest view. The coast is an hour's drive away and York is 30 minutes. Helmsley is a small, popular, attractive market town two and a half miles away, where there are plenty of restaurants, pubs and an open-air swimming pool. We are situated near Rievaulx Abbey, Castle Howard and Flamingoland.

What do you like to do on a rare day off?

My own housework or catch up with friends and family.

Information

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GOLDEN SQUARE CARAVAN AND CAMPING PARK NORTH YORKSHIRE

went back to the caravan park and I was able to sometimes take my children with me. From a young age they learnt how to clean toilets.

What made you want to own and run a campsite?

I never really knew what I wanted to do in life and I just progressed into it naturally.

What do you like most about being a campsite owner/manager?

Meeting and talking to people.

What are the challenges?

Keeping and running the park at its five-star rating is the biggest challenge, along with keeping customers happy and finding good, reliable staff who will stay.

What is a typical day like for you?

I am very hands on so there is the reception, ie taking bookings, online or over the phone, and doing emails. I also serve in the well-stocked, licensed shop which sells newspapers, bread, cakes, alcohol, toys, etc.

CORNWALL



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TAKING THE PLUNGE

Why a solo campervan trip could be the mental health break you need

Words & pictures ■ Liz Morrell



Instagram's depiction of vanlife and 'van travel can be intimidating – it's often an exaggerated view of perfection which can be harmful to our mental health. It can make us feel that our 'vans or trips aren't up to scratch and that a 'van trip isn't even possible until we have the perfect 'van, the perfect companion and the perfect itinerary planned. Yet a break in even the most basic of campervans to the most basic of sites can be enough to revive our souls and minds.

It's important to remember that life isn't always a picture book. It can be messy and it can be hard. And in those moments you realise that it isn't about what the 'van looks like or how much it cost – it's that it creates a safe space that allows an easy escape when life can be a bit rubbish and you need a break.

It's no secret that I bought my 'van five years ago now as a kneejerk reaction to a bad relationship break-up – I've written about it in the pages of *Campervan* magazine before. Having the campervan helped pull me from a dark place, rebuilding my confidence and love for life and giving me the promise of new adventures to enjoy. But it was a journey that took time and the first steps weren't easy.

THE IMPACT OF CAMPERVANNING ON MENTAL HEALTH

The link between being outside and its positive impact on mental health has long been obvious. It makes camping the perfect choice for a mental health boost. Connecting with nature, getting away from the stresses of everyday life and breathing in fresh air are healthier options than being slumped in front of the television or doomscrolling on our mobile phones.

In 2022, the Camping and Caravanning Club published the Outjoyment Report, a survey of nearly 11,000 people that looked at their reasons for camping. The results showed that 97% of campers said that happiness was

their top motivator for camping, while 93% valued it for the benefits it brought to their wellbeing and the same amount camped to enjoy being in nature – the second-highest motivator after happiness. Nearly half (44%) of campers said that they had optimal health as a result of going camping.

GOING IT ALONE

I'd camped for years with my children so I knew the benefits of a camping break. In fact it had helped heal me after a previous relationship. The out-of-the-blue 'van purchase was because I still wanted the



camping experience but with the extra security, flexibility and, to be honest, less work of a campervan.

I could have made it much easier on myself





in those early days by easing myself in through meet-ups – there are plenty for those nervous about going it alone. Yet much of my motivation at the time was powered by a certain ‘f*** you’ attitude to proving that I would be OK post break-up. I also knew it would be a healing process I had to go through and I felt more comfortable doing it alone than blubbing in front of friends or strangers. More importantly, I also had to prove to everyone I knew that buying my ‘van on a whim wasn’t the crazy idea many thought it was.

FINDING YOUR TRIBE

Plucking up the courage, however, wasn’t easy. When I first got my ‘van I’d joined a few Facebook groups for help and advice. One of these, a women’s only forum, would be pivotal for me. In April 2021 I wrote my first post describing my nerves at my first trip out, even though it was just a solo day trip paddleboarding at Wimbleball Lake in Exeter. I was scared and nervous to go alone and admitted so on the group. The response was overwhelming:

“Big deep breath, get out and there and enjoy,” said one woman. “Enjoy the freedom

and your independence,” said another.

There was great advice from solo travellers: “I adventure alone and it was so daunting at first. Make a plan, push through even if it feels weird. It gets easier, I promise.”

Possibly the best advice was to just take that first step: “Get in your ‘van and drive somewhere playing your favourite songs and have a cuppa at your destination. You don’t have to make yourself do anything on your first few trips – just getting out there is the first step.”

Others hinted at the thrills to come if I could overcome my nerves: “Lean into the stuff that scares you the most – you’ll have the biggest adventures of your life that way.”

And for my worries about being out there alone? “Listen to your gut – it will always guide you.” It was all brilliant advice that made me feel so much braver.

MY FIRST SOLO OVERNIGHTER

Another of the responses was the story of a woman reclaiming a special place in her campervan. It inspired me to do the same and

so my first trip away was to somewhere that I needed to reclaim.

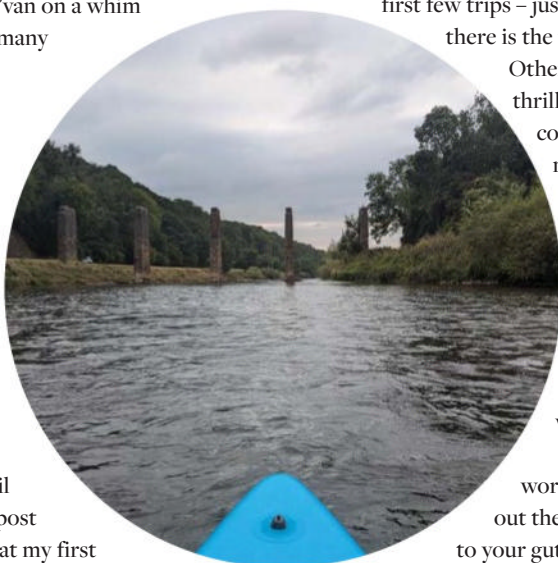
It was a crazy but perfect plan. I liked the idea of reclaiming the space and realised that pushing myself that far out of my comfort zone would distract me from the nerves of my first trip alone.

Confronting the demons by myself was the best thing I could have done. Besides a few tears, I made new positive memories, took time out and met new friends just on the two nights I was away. For someone who is notoriously shy and rarely struck up a conversation on a campsite before, this was a big deal. I was hooked and thanked my new Facebook tribe for giving me the confidence to go it alone.

That first stay was only just over an hour from home to a site I knew and loved, with an owner I’d met previously who checked in on me during my stay. After that I returned to a couple of other sites I knew well, before building up enough confidence to try new places and travel more widely. I fell more in love with the ‘van and the experiences it brought me each time.

FINDING THE MOTIVATION

Four years on I still love the thrill of a solo trip. That said, I’m not always a guns-blazing ready-to-go girl even if the ‘van is always on standby (just add clothes and food). I can be the queen of procrastination before getting ready for a trip if I’m not quite in the mood to go it alone.





I recognise now that sometimes that is just me feeling a little scared. A little daunted. On those occasions, I now accept it's just nerves kicking in. I accept the feeling, give myself a little extra time to faff, then give myself a stern telling off and finally make my move. It works. What I have to remember is that, like going for a walk in the fresh air or hitting the gym, a 'van trip will always lift my mood.

Most recently this happened on a trip last year, only a couple of weeks after I'd done an unplanned trip where I'd returned to that very first site and paddled down the River Wye on my own.

This time I'd opted to try a new site an hour from home that offered live music on a Saturday night. But it was a down day, where I couldn't get myself to move until right at the last moment and was making every excuse not to go. Yet as soon as I climbed into the 'van and turned the music on I was happy, remembering that early advice.

The trouble was that this time the feeling didn't last. When I got to the site my first instinct was actually to turn around and go home. I'd lost my nerve. It was busier than I expected and I realised I wanted some peace, quiet and anonymity.

I cracked open the wine – my procrastinating meant I hadn't got to the site until 5pm – tucked into my tea and got on with the jigsaw I'd slung into the 'van at the last minute, rather than go to watch the music as I'd planned.

Although initially disappointed with myself,

SOLO INSPIRATION

One of the first to inspire me with her tales of solo trips in those early days was Lynne Tyson, a member of the Facebook group that first gave me the confidence to go it alone. Today her frequent getaways continue to inspire.

Since she bought her first 'van, Lola, in 2017, she has travelled extensively, everywhere from the UK to Spain, Portugal and France – much of it solo. She's currently on a solo trip in New Zealand where as well as backpacking she is hiring a 'van to tour around the country.

However, she admits it took a while to relax into travelling alone. "I really wasn't sure I was doing the right thing when I bought my first camper. My partner wasn't interested, so I held back for a while, but finally I decided to just go for it," she says.

She dragged friends along for the ride initially. "It was great fun but it had drawbacks, too – all the extra stuff you have to pack, teaching them when to wave and so on."

Six months in, Lynne went to her first meet on her own. "I thought I would stay for one night but we got snowed in and I stayed for three, I loved it. I was meeting genuine people, with kind hearts and tales to tell. These were folk who had braved going alone and survived to tell the tale. It made me want to do more."

The seed was sown and Lynne began planning her first solo trip, to France in 2019. "It meant I could break the solitude with French friends there. Even better, it turned out a friend, made through the camper meets, wanted to come for part of it, too," she says.

Lynne admits it was daunting arriving alone,

however.

"I felt a bit silly when I arrived solo at my first campsite – like everyone was looking at me – but I quickly found that people are quick to chat once they realise you're on your own and that if you make the effort, even if it's just to say hello, everyone is friendly and like-minded."

She also witnessed how others look out for people travelling on their own. "The first day a couple saw me going out on my paddleboard, did a walk that meant they could keep an eye on me and invited me over for wine later so they could show me the photos they took of me on my paddleboard. How kind was that?"

Lynne is now on her third 'van, having recently upgraded from her VW T5, Rita, and is planning more trips after she returns from New Zealand.

She says in all her years of solo van trips since, it's how she's been treated by others that stands out amongst her many memories. "I have been blown away, time and time again, by people's kindness, friendliness and generosity. It has made travelling solo a complete joy and I've made lifelong friendships along the way."

So what advice does Lynne, who is 62 and currently making new friends of all ages on her latest trip, have for others? "Summon up the courage and just do it. You won't look back. I'm writing this travelling solo in New Zealand – and I'm absolutely loving it!"



within an hour I was happy again, snuggled up with the heater on and realising that it was enough that I'd got away - I didn't have to push myself out of my comfort zone any further if I wasn't feeling up to it. By the next day, my confidence and love for being away had returned with a vengeance and my wobble long forgotten.

HOW SOMETHING GOOD ALWAYS HAPPENS

In all the time since, I've only been on one group meet-up. You could argue I could make it easier on myself - and my mental health - if

I went on more. And yet there's something rather addictive about the buzz of going it alone. You are in full control of your destiny and there is nobody for you to answer to or consider but yourself. That can be hugely freeing from the everyday responsibilities of work and family.

Equally, some of my biggest personal learning and recovery has come from going away in the camper alone. For someone who loves spontaneity rather than long-made plans, it also brings the surprise of the unexpected. And that's probably the biggest buzz of all - on a solo trip I always come away

with a tale to tell, whether that's new friends or new experiences. On that last trip when I was feeling down it was being woken up in the morning to a hot air balloon landing on the campsite. I was truly uplifted. That's the beauty of a solo campervan trip. If you haven't tried it yet then I urge you to give it a go - it may surprise you!



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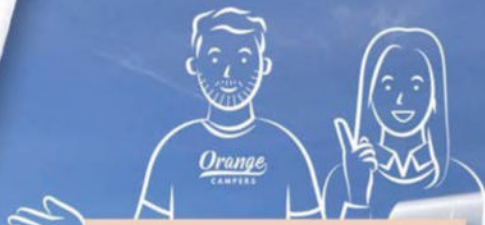


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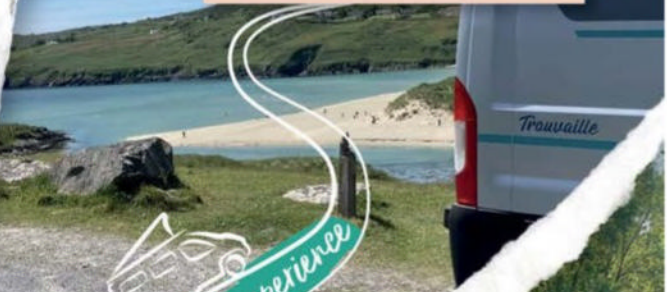
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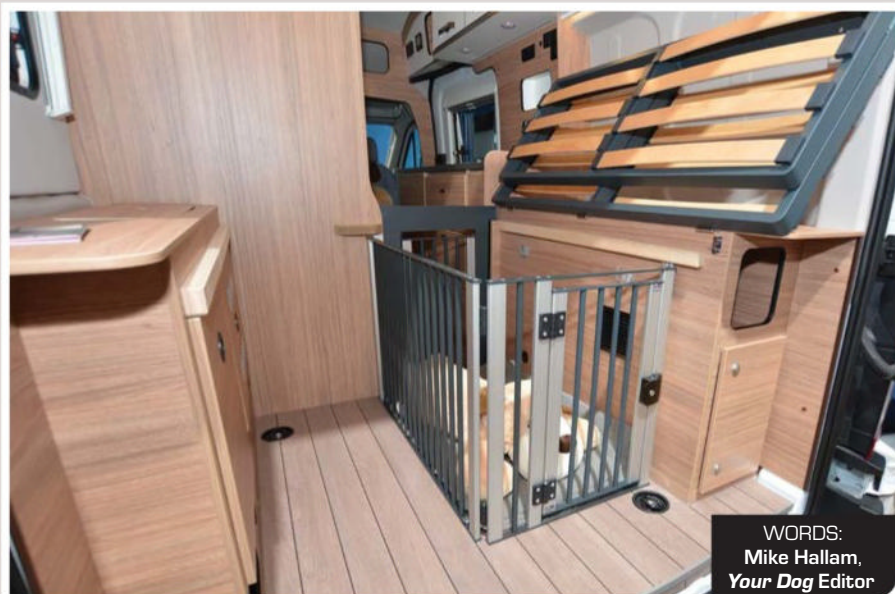




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WORDS:
Mike Hallam,
Your Dog Editor



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SAFETY FIRST WHEN TRAVELLING WITH DOGS

Fastening our seatbelts when travelling in the car seems to be second nature to us humans, but, when it comes to our dogs, it's often a different story – but it shouldn't be.

Rule 57 of the Highway Code states, "When in a vehicle, make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained, so they cannot distract you while you are driving, or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seatbelt harness, pet carrier, dog cage, or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in cars."

Driving with an unrestrained pet could invalidate your insurance and lead to you being charged with a number of offences, from driving without due care and attention to dangerous driving. The punishments can range from penalty points and a fine, to disqualification or even a custodial sentence.

While the Highway Code is mainly focused on protecting humans, restraining your dog is key for their safety, too. Now, when we say 'restrained' it doesn't sound pleasant but it's actually a really kind thing to do. I think it is much more helpful to think of it as contained. It's what we do to ourselves and our children, so we should do the same for our dogs!

The options for this include:

- 🐾 Dog guards/barriers – placed behind front or rear seats, these are designed to safely block off a section of the vehicle.
- 🐾 Crate/travelling kennel – available in a wide

variety of shapes and materials, a small or medium size may fit on the back seat of most vehicles. You may need to rearrange cushions or adjust seats to fit a larger crate in. Crates should be large enough to allow your dog to stand up, lie down, and comfortably turn around.

🐾 Car harnesses – manufactured to withstand the impact of a car accident, the tether attaching it to the seatbelts should be as short as possible to reduce the distance a dog is thrown during an accident.

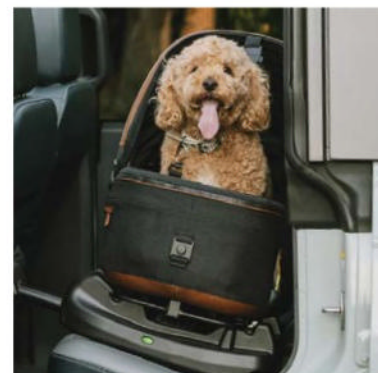
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TRAVEL CHECKLIST

- ✓ Research your travel system – look for a system that's been crash tested
- ✓ A distressed dog who is restrained can still be a major distraction – build up training, beginning with just sitting in the 'van and giving your dog treats. Step by step you can move to closing doors, starting the engine, and then short journeys
- ✓ Check your breakdown cover will permit dogs to travel with them in the event of your vehicle needing to be recovered
- ✓ Never allow your dog to put their head out of the window – it may look fun but, as well as the obvious risks, dust and dirt particles can hurt your dog's eyes
- ✓ Don't travel with your dog sat next to an airbag
- ✓ On longer journeys, give your dog plenty of breaks

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75 YEARS OF COOL



Words ■ Nathaniel Cureton & Peter Vaughan



Transporter factory in Wolfsburg in 1950

The popularity of the Volkswagen campervan shows no signs of waning after 75 years. We look back over the generations, from the splitty to the T6 – and what the future holds.

The Volkswagen Transporter is a legend. This year it marked 75 years in production – a feat unmatched in the commercial vehicle world – and its seventh generation will be with us soon.

Launched at the Geneva Motor Show, the original Bulli – the T1 or splitscreen – arrived with a 25bhp air-cooled petrol engine in the back, driving the rear wheels – just like a Beetle. In fact, the first Transporter was developed from a crude sketch in 1947 by Dutch VW importer, Ben Pon, who saw the potential in developing the Beetle into a commercial vehicle. It was a very different beast to today's sophisticated front-wheel drive (or 4x4) model with up to 196bhp.

The VW bus was originally manufactured in Wolfsburg, but production soon moved to Hanover in 1956, where a significant amount of

the 12.5 million VW buses have since been built.

The anniversary will be celebrated internationally, most notably at the Salzburgering in Austria between 16 and 18 May. In Germany however, the Autostadt, Wolfsburg, will celebrate the anniversary with a two event (24 – 25 May). All generations of VW bus will be on show for visitors along with other activities related to the vehicle. The Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles plant in Hanover-Stöcken will mark the occasion too with a VW Bus & Coffee event. Guests will be able to view the Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles collection with free coffee being offered to anyone who arrives in, and exhibits, a Volkswagen bus.

With the T7 about to hit the roads this year, the Transporter is about to enter another new era, but here we track the history of this most iconic of vehicles...

1950-1967 T1 - THE SPLITTY

The first generation of Transporter has become affectionately known as the splitscreen (splitty), after the design of its windscreen, with two flat panes of glass separated by a central pillar. It entered production on 8 March 1950. Early models had just 1,100cc engines but by 1965 power had risen to a heady 44bhp from a 1.5-litre air-cooled petrol motor, giving a top speed of 65mph.

These vans, thanks to their upright front and the fact that driver and passenger sat over the front wheels, were remarkably compact, at just 4.10m long (as well as being only 1.66m wide). Side doors were a hinged pair, much like the barn doors at the rear of front-engined vans, and onto which converters often mounted cookers.

Campervan derivatives were quickly established in the market, with Westfalia being a pioneer on the Continent with its Camping Box.

In the UK, the likes of Canterbury-Pitt, Devon and Dormobile were early exponents of the German base vehicle.

Buyers seeking a splitty will now need deep pockets – you'll need between £35k and £50k for a really nice one, with some rare models valued at over £100k.



1967-1979 T2 - BAY WINDOW

It was still rear-engined and air-cooled but the T2, or bay window van, which arrived in 1967, introduced a feature that's so much part of VW camper life today – the sliding side door. It was with this generation, too, that side kitchen layouts (still dominant over 50 years on) really became established.

The biggest change was, of course, the restyled front with its curved windscreen – or bay window. The new model was longer, by five and a half inches, as well as fractionally taller and wider.

By 1978, 4.5 million Transporters had left the factory floor. The following year, German T2 production was discontinued but was later relaunched in Brazil, due to the model's popularity in South America. They continued to be manufactured there until 2013.



1979-1990 T3 - THE BRICK



The T3 was longer and wider than its predecessor, but a more radical departure was the squarer styling, earning it the nickname of the 'brick' or 'wedge'. It carried on with rear-mounted, air-cooled engines but the motors were mounted lower and gone was the door in the rear to access the engine, replaced by a flap behind the number plate to check the oil.

Swivel cab seats were now a regular addition to create more living space and the new, roomier body and lower engine deck allowed converters to come up with new ideas, such as Holdsworth's Vision with a rear kitchen and the Diamond RV Autocruiser with a shower compartment.



1990-2003

T4 - FRONT-ENGINE



The fourth-generation VW Transporter model was a technical revolution. Gone was the rear engine of the previous 40 years, replaced by a front-mounted motor driving the front wheels. In the UK, Bilbo's (still converting VWs to this day) stole a march on all its competitors by converting a left-hand drive example.

Some later T4 campers also benefited from the longer, smoother nose of the Caravelle people-carrier and, by the end of T4 production in 2003, around two million examples had left the production line – more than either the T1 or T3.

In the meantime, the Transporter had established itself not just as a campervan but as a basis for larger coachbuilt motorhomes, thanks to its conventional front-engined design.

They may lack the retro charm of earlier VWs but the T4 makes a great camper for those on a budget.

2003-2015

T5 - GROWING UP

The fifth-generation Transporter was more spacious and offered more options than any previous model. Volkswagen described the T5 as having “a much more powerful appearance.” Its flatter sides meant more internal space, an adjustable steering wheel introduced greater driver comfort, and the gearstick moved from the floor to the dashboard in line with commercial vehicle trends.

Like the T4, there were petrol models, too, short and long wheelbase versions, and four-wheel drives, now called 4Motion (rather than Syncro) using a Haldex coupling. After 2009 came the introduction of the seven-speed DSG dual clutch automatic gearbox and the first twin-turbo diesel, offering 178bhp.

Campervans from leading manufacturers such as Auto-Sleepers, Bilbo's and CMC Reimo were usually adapted from T4 designs but the big news was the California. Here was a campervan built entirely in-house by Volkswagen. It boasted a very high spec, including an electric elevating roof and car-like features rarely seen on a camper.



2015-2024

T6 - UP TO DATE



In 2016, the T6 featured a new engine, more comprehensive assist systems, and a more modern infotainment system. On the exterior, the T6 is most recognisable by its redesigned front section, including a new low-drawn front apron. Transporter models of the past were acknowledged through new two-tone paint finishes.

The T6 was kinder to the environment, thanks to Euro 6 engines that use AdBlue, but the newer vehicle was also smoother and more refined.

Bonnet, bumper, grille and headlights were all changed as the T5 morphed into T6 but it was the subtlest of updates, accompanied by enhanced safety features.

Four years later – in autumn 2019 – yet another evolution of the still-iconic camper arrived with the most sophisticated model yet, the T6.1. Electric power steering allowed the introduction of new safety kit such as Cross Wind Assist and Lane Assist. Inside, the cab got a new look that's much closer to the design of the larger Crafter, while a sophisticated digital dashboard display was fitted to the latest California Ocean campervan.

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CAMP NOW, PAY LATER



A campervan can be a huge financial outlay but there are various ways to fund the purchase and make it more affordable – and don't forget you'll need insurance to protect your valuable asset

The cost of buying both new and pre-owned campervans has soared in the last few years.

A new “budget” campervan will set you back more than £60,000 these days, with mid-range ‘vans coming in at £80,000 or more and top-of-the-range campers fetching upwards of £100k.

And that has had a big impact on the way people pay for their ‘vans, whether they’re first-time buyers or looking to upgrade with a trade-in.

If you don’t have an existing campervan to part-exchange then you’ll need deep pockets to get the keys to your first ‘van. And, even if you already have a ‘van, the cost to change could be more than you expect.

WAYS TO PAY

There are numerous ways to pay for your

campervan, but essentially it boils down to paying for it outright, or spreading the cost over a period of time. For most, the latter is the most likely way to achieve the dream of owning a camper but buying outright is a solution for some, particularly older, campers.

Maybe you’ve got savings or received a large inheritance, you’ve decided to downsize your home to free up cash, or you’ve drawn a lump sum from your pension pot. You can withdraw a lump sum from your private pension after the age of 55.

However, for many people, especially younger families, instant access to the sort of cash that would be needed to buy a campervan outright is impossible. Hire purchase, loans and equity release are all realistic alternatives to cash, though.

Do your homework and compare all the different options before signing on the dotted line. There are plenty of handy online calculators that will work out how much you can borrow by setting a deposit amount and monthly repayment costs. It’s vitally important you don’t overstretch yourselves.

HIRE PURCHASE

Many dealers offer finance. These are primarily hire purchase agreements, where you pay a deposit, agree monthly instalments over a fixed term and then pay a fee at the end to make the campervan yours. Some companies will allow you to pay off the balance early, reducing the eventual cost, but there might be a minimum payment term until this is possible. Remember, too, that you’re not officially the owner of the vehicle, so you might have to check with the HP company if you want to make any modifications.

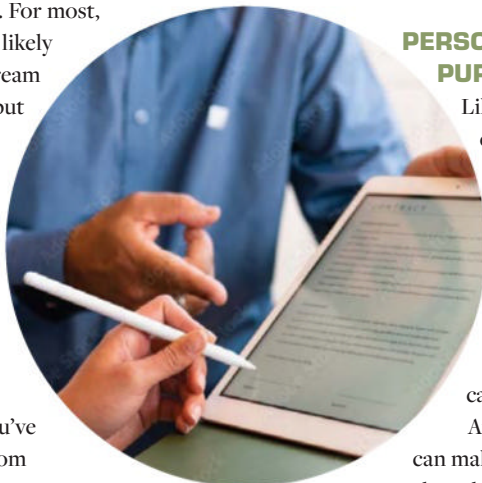
Monthly payments may be affected by credit ratings, so, if you have a poor credit rating (or none at all), your monthly payment sum is likely to be higher.

Factors that determine how long a finance term will be include your monthly budget, the intended period of ownership, and the campervan’s age at the time of purchase. For this type of finance, a campervan can usually be no older than 20 years at the end of the term so, for a 10-year agreement, the ‘van can be no older than 10 years at the start.

PERSONAL CONTRACT PURCHASE (PCP)

Like hire purchase, PCP deals will involve a deposit and fixed monthly instalments, but there is usually a bigger balloon payment at the end. This is a type of finance that is common with car purchases.

At the end of the term, you can make the final payment and own the vehicle, hand it back and walk away, or use the equity you’ve built up within the ‘van as a deposit for your next





purchase. However, there are likely to be terms relating to the return of the vehicle, including keeping to a limited mileage and a lack of damage.

Depending on your initial deposit and monthly payments, and the final value of the vehicle, there might not be any equity left. Negative equity could mean you are liable to pay for the difference.

With any sort of finance, it's worth looking at GAP insurance (guaranteed asset protection). If the campervan is written off or stolen within its term, your regular insurance will only pay out for its market value (new campervans can lose thousands within the first year), making you liable for the shortfall. Good GAP insurance products (there are various types, so check which one is right for you) will make up the rest of the money.

LOAN

You can take out a standard bank loan if you just want to top up your reserves and if your

credit rating is good – there are several free websites that allow you to check this, such as Compare the Market, Experian, ClearScore and Equifax, to name but a few. The interest rates will generally be better than for a finance product. Again, look at the cost of credit, or work out the difference between the total amount payable and the loan value.

LEASING

This is less common with campervans but we've seen VW's own California range available on lease deals. The leasing company buys the campervan and you lease it from that company for an agreed term. Some lease companies may allow you to buy the vehicle at the end of the term, but you won't know what that cost will be until you get closer to the end of the lease.

✓ TOP TIPS

Even if you've decided which route is best for you, it's worth looking at all of the options and shopping around. If it's a fraction of a percent less interest, that can make a big difference on the amount you will end up paying, especially with finance.

There is likely to be a clause in any finance agreement, whether leasing or hire purchase, etc, that stipulates the 'van is for leisure use only and can't be used for full-timing.

MORTGAGE OR EQUITY RELEASE

These types of finance are affected by the amount of equity you currently have in your house. If you are older, then traditional mortgage or remortgage deals may not be available, hence the equity release options.

It's worth knowing that with equity release (which is generally available to the over 55s), if you do still have a mortgage, we are told that the sum drawn must pay off the mortgage before being put to other uses. The most popular equity release product is the lifetime mortgage, where there are no monthly payments, but the value of the loan, plus interest, is taken from the sale of the house if you go into care or pass away.

Taking out a mortgage, or remortgaging to free up cash, will involve monthly payments, and so would require income checks. Also remember that house values can go down, depending on economic trends, meaning possible negative equity, and, if you can't make payments, your house could be repossessed. Seek advice from an independent financial advisor before deciding on either course.

HEAD FOR COVER

As a campervan owner, it's essential to protect your investment and lifestyle. Here's what you need to know about campervan insurance cover

Like any vehicle, you need insurance to legally drive your campervan. Owning a 'van comes with various risks, such as accidents, theft or damage to your vehicle and its contents and insurance is crucial to protect yourself financially and ensure you can continue enjoying your nomadic adventures with peace of mind.

The cost of insurance can vary significantly depending on several factors. Insurance providers consider elements such as the campervan's make and model, age, value, usage, storage location, your driving history, and

where you live. Generally, more expensive or powerful campervans might attract higher insurance premiums, while older or smaller models could be more affordable to insure.

To get the most accurate quote, it's essential you provide precise and up-to-date information to insurance companies and comparing quotes from multiple providers can help you find the best deal that meets your needs and budget.

WHAT DOES INSURANCE COVER?

Campervan insurance policies are designed to

cater to the specific needs of campervanners.

In addition to the basic components, many policies offer additional cover options to enhance protection for campervan owners.

One crucial aspect is cover for personal possessions. Since campervans often serve as both transportation and living space, they tend to carry valuable belongings, such as camping equipment, electronics and personal items, both in the vehicle and the awning. Campervan insurance policies typically include cover for these possessions, protecting them against theft, loss or





damage while on the road or when you're parked at campsites.

Another add-on is breakdown assistance. Breaking down in the middle of a journey can be incredibly inconvenient, especially when you're far from home. Many campervan insurance policies provide roadside assistance and recovery services to ensure you receive help promptly and get back on the road as quickly as possible.

Repatriation cover is also vital for campervan travellers who plan to explore beyond the UK's borders. If your campervan

becomes unroadworthy while abroad, repatriation cover will take care of the expenses involved in bringing you and your vehicle back to the UK.

Campervan insurance may also offer windscreen cover, safeguarding you against the costs of repairing or replacing a damaged windscreen. Given the exposed nature of campervans to debris and road hazards, this cover can prove valuable in keeping your vehicle in top condition.

Many insurers only cover campers for social and domestic use. So, if you drive it to

work or to the station to commute, you'll find you're not covered. Not all insurers can cover this risk, and those that can will often have a relatively low annual mileage limit in place of about 8,000, so be sure to ask if this applies to you.

Not all campervan insurance policies include European cover as standard. If yours doesn't, you can take out European cover as an optional add-on before you travel.

Before finalising a campervan insurance policy, carefully review the options and any additional benefits included. By tailoring your insurance to your specific needs, you can travel safe in the knowledge that you have total protection for your campervan, belongings and adventures, when you're on the road.

CONVERSION COVER

If you've converted a van into a campervan, insuring it correctly can be more complex. If your campervan has undergone a conversion, you should declare it as such to your insurance provider. Conversions typically involve adding living accommodations such as a bed, kitchenette, or toilet facilities. Not declaring the conversion accurately could lead to issues when making a claim, as standard van insurance might not adequately cover the

Types of Campervan Insurance

Different campervan lifestyles require tailored insurance solutions. Just like car insurance, you need to decide whether you need comprehensive, third-party fire and theft or third-party-only cover.

COMPREHENSIVE

Comprehensive cover pays out to repair or replace your 'van if it's damaged in an accident or suffers malicious damage.

THIRD-PARTY, FIRE AND THEFT

This covers your 'van from damage caused by fire or theft but not if it's damaged in a crash. It will cover the other driver if you are involved in an incident.

THIRD-PARTY ONLY

The minimum cover available, protects you if you cause damage to someone's property or injure them while driving.

OTHER INSURANCE TYPES

FULL-TIME LIVING INSURANCE

Full-time campervan living insurance is a specialised type of cover designed for individuals or families who have embraced a nomadic lifestyle and live in their campervans as their primary residence. Unlike traditional campervan insurance, which typically assumes intermittent

use, full-time living insurance acknowledges the unique risks and needs of those who reside in their vehicles permanently.

This comprehensive policy provides extended cover for personal possessions, liability protection and essential amenities, such as water and gas systems. The policy may also offer you alternative accommodation if your campervan becomes temporarily uninhabitable.

SHORT-TERM INSURANCE

Temporary cover for rentals or short-term usage. Short-term campervan insurance is ideal for individuals who plan to use a campervan for a brief period, such as a weekend getaway or a short holiday. This type of insurance offers temporary cover, usually ranging from a single day to several weeks. It provides essential protection for the campervan against accidents, theft and damage during the specified rental or usage period.

CLASSIC INSURANCE

These are specialised policies for vintage and classic campervans.

EXCESS INSURANCE

Campervan excess insurance is a specialised type of insurance that covers the excess amount that you would have to pay towards a claim on your regular campervan insurance policy or if you are renting a campervan. When you make an insurance claim, there is usually an excess or deductible amount that you are responsible for paying. Excess insurance helps to reimburse you for this excess amount, reducing your out-of-pocket expenses in case of a claim.



modifications and contents. Basically, anything which changes the way your van looks or drives is considered a modification.

While it's not essential to have your campervan classified as a motor caravan by the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency), in order to get campervan-specific insurance, some insurers will require it. So, if you are buying a conversion, be sure to check

its V5C or you could find that insurance might become a problem.

SECURITY MEASURES

Good security is a must to protect your campervan from theft and it also attracts discounts from some insurance companies, as alarms and tracking devices make theft less likely. While you may get a discount on your

premium if they're fitted, some companies will insist on this before they will even consider providing cover

Many new campervans already come with trackers pre-installed but, if your model doesn't, then consider having one fitted – there are lots of companies around that offer a fitting service, and a good insurer may also be able to offer advice.

Also use visible deterrents like steering wheel locks and clutch claws, as anything that deters or impedes thieves is a good thing when it comes to insurance.

CHOOSING AN INSURANCE PROVIDER

Don't just accept the first quote you get, but make sure you shop around to find the best deal. Don't just look at the headline price; pin down what you're getting for your money as well as whether or not there are any add-ons.

Not all policies are the same; some allow you to tailor things to suit your needs while others are little more than car policies, which don't provide the specialist cover you need.

Have a list of your specific needs and ask questions about the cover to compare like for like as, if you don't, you could end up without crucial benefits. Specialist brokers will ask all the relevant questions, too, so make sure you have all the details of the campervan, drivers and the intended use before you call.





✓ TOP TIPS

- Don't forget to consider the actual contents of your campervan – specialist policies generally cover the items inside your campervan, but it's worth checking what the maximum value per item is. If they're covered by other policies (such as home insurance), then they may not be covered by the campervan insurance
- It's worth thinking about areas such as gas and explosion cover, too. While such incidences are very rare, they can happen, so make sure you are covered. Then there's new-for-old cover, which is a very important benefit if you've purchased your campervan from new. If you want to lend your camper to family or friends or even hire it out in an Airbnb-style service, then ensure it's fully insured for this
- If you're selling a car to buy your campervan, it is possible to transfer your no claims bonus from your car policy to your new campervan policy
- Being a member of a major Club, like the Caravan and Motorhome Club or the Camping and Caravanning Club, often attracts a discount on your insurance. In addition, both of the Clubs have their own insurance services



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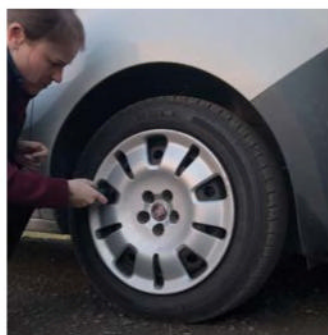
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LIFE BEYOND BRICKS

Tash heads out for spring – but not before some essential ‘pre-flight’ checks



We are well into spring now and I know lots of you will have already been out and about in your 'vans. Well, it's finally my turn! I got to dust off the Doblò and take him for a spin. But because Fabio has been sat still for a while, I needed to do comprehensive 'pre-flight' checks.

I always like to try and do things for myself. I could easily get my vehicle technician husband to check it for me but I'm determined to do it myself. Especially as I've found that when you don't do something regularly, sometimes you can forget how to do it.

Remember last year when Jon was suddenly taken ill and I was left in charge of the big 'van? That was a crash course in remembering how to do things and I want to keep on top of that! In this scenario with the Doblò, I'm talking more about checking the mechanical side of the vehicle than the habitation area, but it's worth keeping up to date with all of it.

The first things I checked were

under the bonnet: oil, screenwash and antifreeze. The oil should always be comfortably between the minimum and maximum indicators on the dipstick, which mine was. It was a good start!

Then I checked the screenwash, which needed topping up. Thankfully we had some so I diluted it into three litres of water and topped it up. Finally, a visual check of the antifreeze was fine, it was sat nicely between the minimum and maximum levels.

So far so good. Then I checked my tyre pressures. It's best to do this before you've used the vehicle, or 'check them cold'. I did this using the tyre pressure gauge I keep in the glove compartment. The fronts were a little low so my next stop was to a garage to top those up. If you're ever unsure what your

pressures should be, there is usually a sticker on the inside of the driver's door that tells you. It will be updated on a motorhome or campervan to reflect the vehicle's leisure vehicle status.

Personally, I like to check my lights are all working, as well. Light bulbs can go at any time, of course, but it's always good to check them and form the habit of doing so.

If I'm on my own and don't

have anyone to confirm them for me, I try and find a dark wall or large window I can park in front of. Then, I can see if the front lights are both functioning and turn around and use my mirrors to check if the rear lights are all working. You may think this strange but it works! It's how I used to complete quality control checks when I worked in the motor trade as a service advisor. I would check vehicles at random following work, before they left the dealership. I had a particular window around the back of the dealership I could use to do this. Worked every time!

Then I completed my trip prep by sanitising my water tank, making sure the 12v system switched on OK and the sockets worked and, finally, turning on my gas and firing up the hob. Thankfully, everything was spot on.



• If you're unsure about checking your vehicle yourself, Jon will be leading some vehicle maintenance sessions at selected Warners shows this season. Check the shows page at outandaboutlive.co.uk for further details!

♥ Read more about Tash and Jon's adventures at lifebeyondbricks.co.uk and follow them on social media





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NEWS

Find out what's going on in the world of campervanning

AURA CAMPERVANS DEBUT

There is a new name in campervans – called Aura – which was launched at the recent NEC show.

The company previewed the rear lounge Aura 7 EL campervan, which offers a separate shower in the washroom up front with a fully equipped kitchen opposite.

The Aura 7 EL starts at £77,777, based on the 140hp Citroën Relay with a six-speed manual gearbox.

There are four other layouts available. Each can be customised with options for exterior colours, as well as fabrics and woods inside, with numerous options on specification, too.



NEW HYBRID CAMPERVAN FROM VANTAGE

Campervan manufacturer, Vantage, has confirmed that a new Ford petrol hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) is currently in production and will be an option on its Fuze and Luna models.

General Manager, Ben Dawes, said, “We will be adding the base vehicle as an option on

our campervans at a cost of £4,000. The Luna PHEV and Fuze PHEV are available to order now.”

The company’s first step into hybrid electric vehicles will be on the Transit Custom with a new 2.5-litre Duratec 225hp plug-in hybrid powertrain and the CVT (continuously variable transmission) automatic gearbox.

Vantage says it blends an urban-friendly all-electric range with the fuel efficiency, convenience and hybrid capabilities of long-distance petrol and electric vehicles.

To incorporate the PHEV base vehicle, a few changes have been made. The Webasto diesel heater has been replaced with a Truma VarioHeat gas and electric heater to allow room for a larger gas tank, increasing in capacity to 50 litres from the previous 16 litres. Vantage says this will also help with heating and cooking off-grid. Elsewhere the full spare wheel has been removed and replaced with a tyre inflator kit.



COUNCIL CONSULTS ON OVERNIGHT STAYS

Moray Council in Scotland is to consult with local communities to manage overnight stays for motorhomes and campervans on designated council-owned sites.

The proposed scheme will support sustainable tourism, while ensuring any concerns of local communities are addressed. Local residents, businesses and community groups will be asked of their thoughts and concerns before a final decision, and report, is made.

Chair of Moray Council’s Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee, Cllr Marc Macrae, said: “Tourism plays a key role in Moray’s economy, and we recognise the growing popularity of campervan and motorhome travel.



RENAULT ANNOUNCES NEW ELECTRIC VANS

The Renault Estafette name is returning in a line-up of electric vans being introduced from 2026.

We saw Estafette campervans in the 1960s in the UK, but, for now, just a new Estafette electric van has been announced, along with two further models, the Trafic and the Goëlette E-Tech.

The Trafic E-Tech is a more traditional van, but with a short front overhang and extended wheelbase to maximise interior space without affecting the turning circle. It will be less than 1.9m high to allow access to multi-storey car parks; although, remember that, if converted, a pop-top roof will add to this height.

The Goëlette E-Tech is available as a chassis cab model (as well as tipper or box), while the Estafette is tall (2.60m) but narrow (1.92m), with



a headroom of 1.90m. At 5.27m long and with a sliding door on an invisible integrated track, it is possible a converter could choose to turn this into a campervan but none have yet confirmed this new van will appear as a campervan.

FRANCE PASSION LAUNCHES LATEST GUIDE

France Passion has unveiled the thirty-third edition of its guide, with a web version and app for tourists looking to explore the country.

With no prior booking required, subscribers can stay for free at over 2,220 stopovers – including farms, vineyards and other locations, giving them a chance to immerse themselves in the local culture.



“This consultation will allow us to explore how we might provide suitable overnight parking locations and allow us to understand the views of the local communities before any decision is made.”

Initial locations proposed for short stays include Lossiemouth, Portgordon and Craigellachie, to name a few. However, the floor has been left open for communities to suggest other locations, too. Moray Council says further details of the consultation process will be shared in due course.

CELEBRATING 80 YEARS OF PENTEWAN SANDS

Family-owned and run since 1945, beachside Pentewan Sands Holiday Park in Cornwall is celebrating 80 years of holidays in 2025.

To mark the eight decades of providing Cornish family holidays by the sea, there are lots of events, offers and prize giveaways planned throughout the year. Part of the celebrations includes a brand-new festival on Pentewan Sands’ private beach.

A blend of music, wellbeing and live performances, Pentunes Festival promises to be the big event of the year. Taking place on 19 and 20 September, you can buy tickets to include day tickets, weekend tickets, and weekend camping passes, too. This is a family-friendly event and children under the age of five go free.

Reflecting on their 80 years of owning and running the campsite, the Pentewan family said, “In the aftermath of two world wars, we decided it was time to fill the shores of the south coast of Cornwall with laughter and joy once again. We built the foundations of our holiday destination on a disused American army camp, and the rest, as they say, is history.”

Continually upgrading and improving the site

is something the team at Pentewan Sands do regularly and is one reason the site has been a member of the high-quality Premier Parks campsite group for many years.

This year sees the addition of on-pitch EV chargers, with a commitment to install chargers on 70% of the pitches within the next five years. The indoor pool area has been upgraded to bring a refreshed swimming experience. New Cornish hedging is also being added to improve the landscaping of the touring area.





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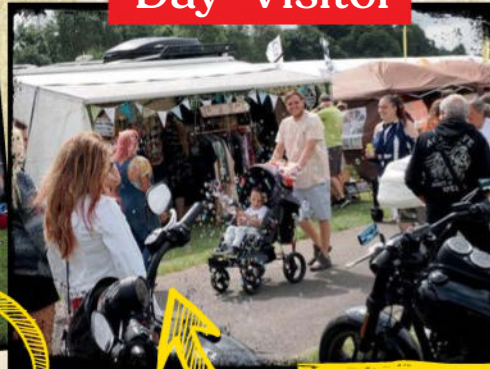
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REVIEWED

ERIBA CAR 602



The new Eriba Car 602 takes design cues from an iconic caravan – but is it a future icon in its own right?

Words & pictures
■ Iain Duff



PROS

- Stylish appearance inside and out
- Plenty of kitchen and lounge storage

CONS

- Lack of worktop space
- Narrow single beds



One of the problems with getting old is that you get easily annoyed by things that really shouldn't annoy you. Such as the word 'iconic'. It gets thrown about all the time for everyday items that are clearly not iconic. When a new flavour of crisps is described as iconic, you know it's gone too far.

However, some things do deserve that description, and one of them is the Eriba pop-top caravan. First launched more than 60 years ago, its unmistakable shape and compact design have made it a cult classic across Europe.

Now Eriba has moved into campervans with the launch of the Eriba Car, incorporating some of that 'iconic' caravan look in the design. So far, there are two versions of the Eriba Car; the 600 – which was voted Best Fixed Bed Campervan in our 2025 Campervan awards – and this, the 602, a UK-friendly, two-berth rear lounge model.

Rather than the typical Fiat Ducato, Eriba has gone for the more premium (and better driving) option of the Volkswagen Crafter. You might, therefore, expect it to be priced on the high side, but that's not the case.

Both start at £71,120, pretty reasonable for a well-appointed Crafter.

Be aware, though, the price will creep up when you start looking at options. As you see it, this model was £90,570, although you should be able to get a well-spec'd 602 for around £80k.

First impression of the 602 is that, with the striking duo-tone paint scheme, it really does look the part. You have a choice of three colour possibilities, all of which are impressive looking – Deep Ocean Blue and white, Cherry Red and white or the metallic silver and grey you see here.

The Eriba Car has a 2-litre, 140hp engine. For £1,140 it can be upgraded to 163hp. The standard six-speed manual gearbox can be swapped for an eight-speed automatic for £2,560.

NEW CAMPERVANS



Whichever option you decide to go for, the standard spec features include stop/start, front fog and cornering lights, hill start assistance, tiredness detection, a multifunction leather steering wheel, four speakers, front and rear parking sensors and a reversing camera.

There's no large storage shelf above the front seats but there are pockets for stashing maps, documents and glasses. And that extra headroom means you can comfortably walk through from the cab to the lounge without having to stoop.

At 6m long, the Crafter is easy to manoeuvre and is compact enough to zip around town or negotiate twisting country roads.

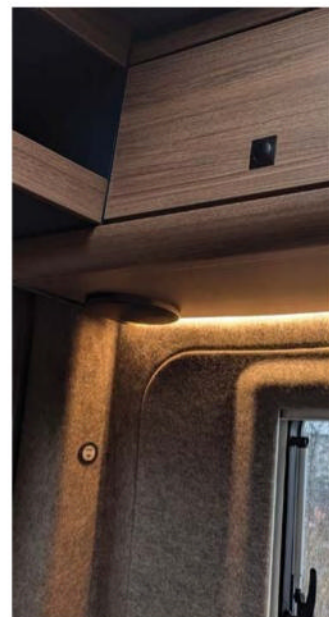
We managed to get our hands on the first (and, at the time of writing, only) UK version of the 602 in this country. The sliding door remains on the European side, although this doesn't seem to be a problem for most UK buyers, especially as there are no rear passenger seats.

The side entrance is fitted with a sliding flyscreen and there's an electric step that glides in and out at the press of a button. These are fairly commonplace nowadays, but, I have to admit, I always find such gadgetry impressive!

The Eriba feels more spacious inside than you might expect for a Crafter-based 'van (slightly narrower than the more common Fiat Ducato), both in the kitchen and the living area. It's a two-berth and only has travel seats for two, so it is very much for couples.

The whole interior looks smart, with Deep Ocean blue furniture contrasting with the wood tones of the worktop and eye-level lockers. Curved corners and high-quality felt trim (for heat and noise insulation, as well as aesthetics) enhance the look.

The side kitchen features a two-burner gas hob and sink, with glass lids. Running the length of the unit above is an open-fronted cupboard and the three soft-closing drawers below (one with a cutlery



tray) provide impressive storage.

Where the kitchen does disappoint is the lack of worktop space. When the glass lids are lifted there is none, although there is a neat slide-out work surface between the fridge and wardrobe opposite.

Two mains sockets are fitted on the front of the galley and I loved the folding table on the back of the kitchen – ideal for enjoying the al fresco lifestyle. The Dometic fridge sits behind the passenger seat and is a 70-litre compressor model with a freezer section, a couple of shelves and a vegetable drawer at the base. Given this is a two-berth campervan, it's a perfectly adequate size.

If you need more cooking options, you can get a microwave for an extra £350. It's located in the lounge, above the nearside sofa.

The rear lounge is a comfortable space, with plenty of room for stretching out on the two inward-facing benches. The windows in the lounge open to let in fresh air and there's a 70cm by 50cm rooflight

above the lounge, too.

Upholstery comes in a choice of Toledo Sand or Seattle Stone, with two full-leather and two part-leather options offered for an additional £1,770.

Storage is generous in the lounge, too. Under the nearside seat is a large space and there are overhead



FACT FILE

ERIBA CAR 602

PRICE from £71,120

As tested £90,570 base vehicle

Volkswagen Crafter 35

Engine 2-litre, 140hp, six-speed manual (standard)

Berths 2

Travel seats 2

Length 5.99m

Width 2.07m

Height 2.67m

Gross vehicle weight 3,500kg

Payload 701kg (standard spec)

KEY FEATURES

- Two-burner hob
- Dometic 70-litre compressor fridge
- Rear single beds: 1.90m x 0.62m; Alternative double: 1.90m x 1.68cm
- 100-litre fresh water tank (inboard)
- 80-litre waste water tank (underslung)
- Truma Combi D 6 E diesel heater with 10-litre hot water boiler
- Storage for 2 x 11kg gas cylinders
- 2 x 80Ah (lithium) leisure batteries

OPTIONS

Fitted to test vehicle:

There are several, including 17in black alloy wheels (£1,820), Camping Package (£880), microwave (£350), Discover Media sat-nav (£980), leather upholstery (£1,770), plus more



VERDICT

Like its award-winning sister, the Eriba Car 602 is full of style and quality. With that premium Crafter base, a British-style end lounge layout and a host of desirable features, it's got lots going for it. The relatively compact size belies a spacious, bright interior suited for a couple and the modern interior design really makes it stand out from the crowd. Is it a future icon? Time will tell, but it's certainly a special 'van.

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FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE 602 IS THAT, WITH THE STRIKING DUO-TONE PAINT SCHEME, IT REALLY DOES LOOK THE PART

lockers running the length of the lounge on both sides. An open shelf (with elasticated retainers) provides more storage space above the rear doors. Do be careful here; I cracked my head on this getting up from the seat.

One potential issue is the free-standing dining table. It has two legs at one end and one at the other – make sure you place it so the single leg is at the end you'll be accessing, otherwise you might find that you struggle to squeeze your legs past.

At night, the rear lounge converts into the bedroom, with two lengthways single beds with disc springs. If, like me, you find the beds a little too narrow in their single configuration, you can slide out a central section to effectively create a double, although that middle part doesn't go the full length of the singles. While it takes a bit longer to

set up, it does give you more shoulder space.

The washroom sits opposite the galley, and it is accessed via a folding door. The blue theme continues in here and there's a cupboard, an opening window and a rooflight.

It's relatively spacious with a swivel cassette toilet and folding basin to give you more room for showering. The showerhead extends from the basin tap and there are a couple of wall hooks.

Unfortunately, the latter requires the use of a shower curtain.

A magnifying mirror for shaving is part of the £880 Camping package. That also adds cab blinds, two rechargeable lights, scatter cushions for the lounge and a mattress topper. Other extras available

include heated cab seats (£350), Park Assist (£520) and the Discover Media sat-nav system with a 10in screen (£980).



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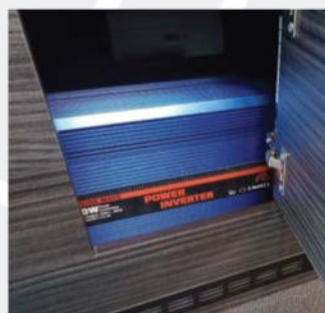
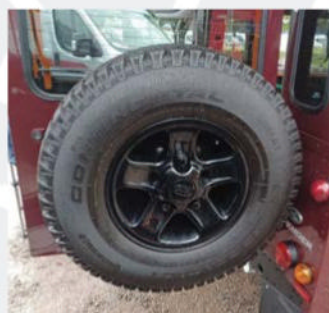
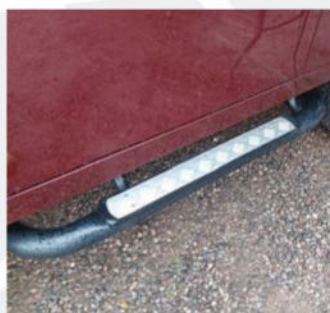
This one of a kind is for Land Rover devotees...

Words
■ Peter Vaughan

As soon as the classic Land Rover went out of production in 2016, prices skyrocketed – only a handful of vehicles have ever attracted such a devoted following. After a continuous run of 67 years, the Series and Defender models had been forced off sale by legislation with which they could no longer comply. Over two million vehicles had been built, not just in the Landie's Solihull home but around the world – in Australia, Brazil, Jordan, Kenya,

Malaysia, Pakistan, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and Zimbabwe. Even the later Defender name dates back to as long ago as 1990, making this most iconic of all 4x4s an instantly recognisable vehicle all over the planet.

So, years on from the original Defender's demise it was something of a shock to see a virtually brand-new one converted into a campervan and on sale at the Southwest Campervan & Motorhome Show at Shepton Mallet last year. But then Dormobile's history is almost as long as the Land Rover's with the company's first 'bedroom on wheels', based on a Bedford CA, emerging from the



Folkestone factory in 1952. It soon converted a variety of different vehicles into campervans, with Land Rovers joining the range with the trademark side-hinged rising roof way back in 1969. Bedfords and bay window VWs may have been bigger sellers but Dormobile almost had a niche to itself with these off-road campervans, decades before the current fad for SUVs.

Back to today and the current Dormobile business is in the New Forest, rather than Kent, and it continues to convert a variety of base vehicles, from Transit Customs to Boxers and Crafters. What made it tackle not just an old Land

Rover but the very compact 90 model, we're not quite sure, but it must have something to do with the brand's history and the fact that it still offers full restoration services for its older 'vans – and that it can fit a new pop-top roof to your Series Land Rover.

Clearly, the company likes a challenge because, while the long-wheelbase Defender 110 – at 4.60m long, with a good chunk of that devoted to the bonnet – is hardly a rival for a Sprinter when it comes to internal living space, the shorter 90 is so petite that few would think it possible to make it into a camper. The Defender 90 is about the same

WHO IS DORMOBILE?

Perhaps the oldest name in campervans in the UK, Dormobile was also once one of our biggest brands. The original company closed its doors at Tile Kiln Lane, Folkestone, in 1994, but just three years later the name was reborn in a modest way and in 2020 the marque was relaunched.

Today, it offers restoration services for classic Dormobiles (including the sought-after Land Rovers), as well as thoroughly contemporary conversions on the Ford Transit Custom, MAN TGE, Peugeot Boxer and VW Transporter. Importantly, Dormobile conversions have both National Caravan Council (NCC) approval and Type Approval.

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FACT FILE

DORMOBILE OVERLANDER

Base Vehicle Land Rover 90

Price from £99,995

(16-plate vehicle)

Berths 2

Travel seats 2

Length 3.86m

Width 1.79m

Height 2.12m approx

Gross weight 3,040kg

Payload Estimated 650kg

BUY A DORMOBILE FROM...

Dormobile sells its vehicles from a former Vauxhall car dealership premises, with indoor showroom, in Lyndhurst in the heart of the New Forest. There it operates Monday to Friday and you can see a selection of its current conversions in stock.

length as a modern Mini...

On a cost per metre then, this must be one of the most expensive campervans ever but, as we said at the outset, Defender prices went crazy as soon as you couldn't get a new one. This last-of-the-line model looked factory fresh and had just delivery mileage. Nevertheless, its near-£100k price ticket caused a few gasps at the show!

For that you got a one-off, an unrepeatable vehicle for a Land Rover collector. Of course, it has the classic side-hinged Dormobile roof with the windows in the top – great for views out when raised – as well as a 100W solar panel. The lid's black finish matches the bumpers, grille, side steps and alloy wheels and, when raised, it provides over

8ft of internal headroom as well as room for a double bed.

Externally, though, the most novel feature is the drop-down side hatch – like a serving station for the kitchen and sited under the Tuff-Trek awning to give you protection from the elements.

Inside, it's small – but perfectly formed – with the galley (featuring a two-burner hob and sink) on the nearside and a bench seat opposite. A portable fridge sits between the two cab seats. Spec also includes a lithium battery, inverter, bamboo worktops, diesel heating, an enhanced audio system and external shower. But, having spent £100k, would you be too scared to get this Land Rover dirty?



REVIEWED

CAMPERKING SANTORINI

Among CamperKing's range of VW-based campervans, the Santorini is a six-seater and long-wheelbase only. To get six seats, however, you'll have to opt for a double passenger cab seat which, as we all know, is uncomfortable to travel in, awkward

to swivel, and prevents any walk-through to the rear. So, a five-seat Santorini, with individual cab chairs (each with armrests, is the way to go unless you must have room for six backsides.

As well as those separate seats, luxuriously trimmed in red leather with a cross-stitched pattern in the centres (a £1,080 option), this particular

There's a new wider seat/bed with Isofix in this LWB camper

Words & pictures
■ Peter Vaughan





Santorini seemed to have all the options thrown at it, resulting in a list price of – deep breath time! – £80,000.

Those red seats pick up on the striking exterior in Fortana Red metallic. The base vehicle is a nearly new Highline-spec T6.1 with the 150hp engine and DSG automatic combination that savvy buyers will search out. But the spec goes further than it did when this Transporter came out of Hannover.

It has Comfort lowering springs (£1,036), attractive five-spoke 20in alloy wheels with BFGoodrich all-terrain tyres (£1,674), CamperKing graphics (£60), side bars (£474), a sunshade awning (£954) and a black gloss kit, including the VW badges (£1,218). It certainly looks the part, even if

the barn doors (rather than a tailgate) and sliding windows with inset panes let the side down a tad.

Inside, the long-wheelbase van's extra space is ideal for dog owners and families but the star feature is the new M1 pull-tested Titan Beds seat system, which includes Isofix. As a seat it has various reclined positions, while as a bed it is wider than before – 1.28m – with a length of 1.83m. Another plus is the chaise longue position for the bed, which is achieved by raising the rearmost section. Dining is catered for by three miniature tables (each 43cm by 25cm) that store under the back seat. Two sit on either side of the bench, the third serves the swivelled cab passenger chair.

Around the back, CamperKing claims “industry-

WHO IS CAMPERKING?



CamperKing says it converts more VWs into campervans than any other UK firm – as many as a thousand a year!

Its range is entirely Transporter-based and includes the St Tropez, Monte Carlo, Le Mans, Santorini and Portofino, with some models offering a choice of short or long wheelbase. The latest addition to the range is the Pursuit Day Van, available with or without a pop-top. A T7 camper is expected to join the line-up soon.

Its 3.5-acre site in Warwickshire includes a showroom, camping shop and café. It's not a National Caravan Council member and its conversions do not have Type Approval.

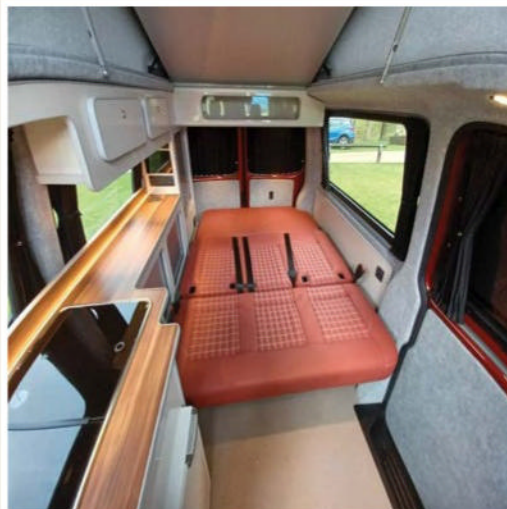


FACT FILE

CAMPERKING SANTORINI
Base Vehicle VW Transporter
T6.1
Price from £80,000 (as shown), conversion only from £22,937 or £32,926 as shown
Berths 4
Travel seats 5/6
Length 5.30m
Width 1.90m
Height 2.07m
Gross weight 3,000kg
Payload TBC

BUY A CAMPERKING FROM...

CamperKing sells direct from its showrooms near Banbury, where at time of writing it was listing 24 VW campers in stock, with prices ranging from £42,995 to £74,995 – all of them ready to drive away. All conversions are covered by a 12-month warranty which is renewed every time you return for a habitation check. You don't have to go to Banbury to see a CamperKing camper, though. It also lists 12 dealer locations; Belper, Chorley, Christchurch, Cross Hands (Carmarthenshire), Falkirk, Glasgow, Hull, Macclesfield, Newcastle, Rickmansworth, Southampton and Stratford-upon-Avon.



leading boot space” and it’s certainly up there with the better designs, even if it can’t match those with sliding seat versatility. However, the carpeted floor here is ill-judged for practicality and the exposed gas pipe leading to the optional external barbecue point looked rather vulnerable.

Back inside, the long galley has

plenty of worktop, despite the wide rear seat, and the lower/curved section at the front of the kitchen won’t restrict tall drivers getting comfy, which can be a real issue in some rivals. A broly holder here is a neat touch.

The combined two-burner hob and sink and the 51-litre Vitrefrigo fridge are fairly standard campervan fare, while the tambour-doored cupboard alongside the bench seat offers a

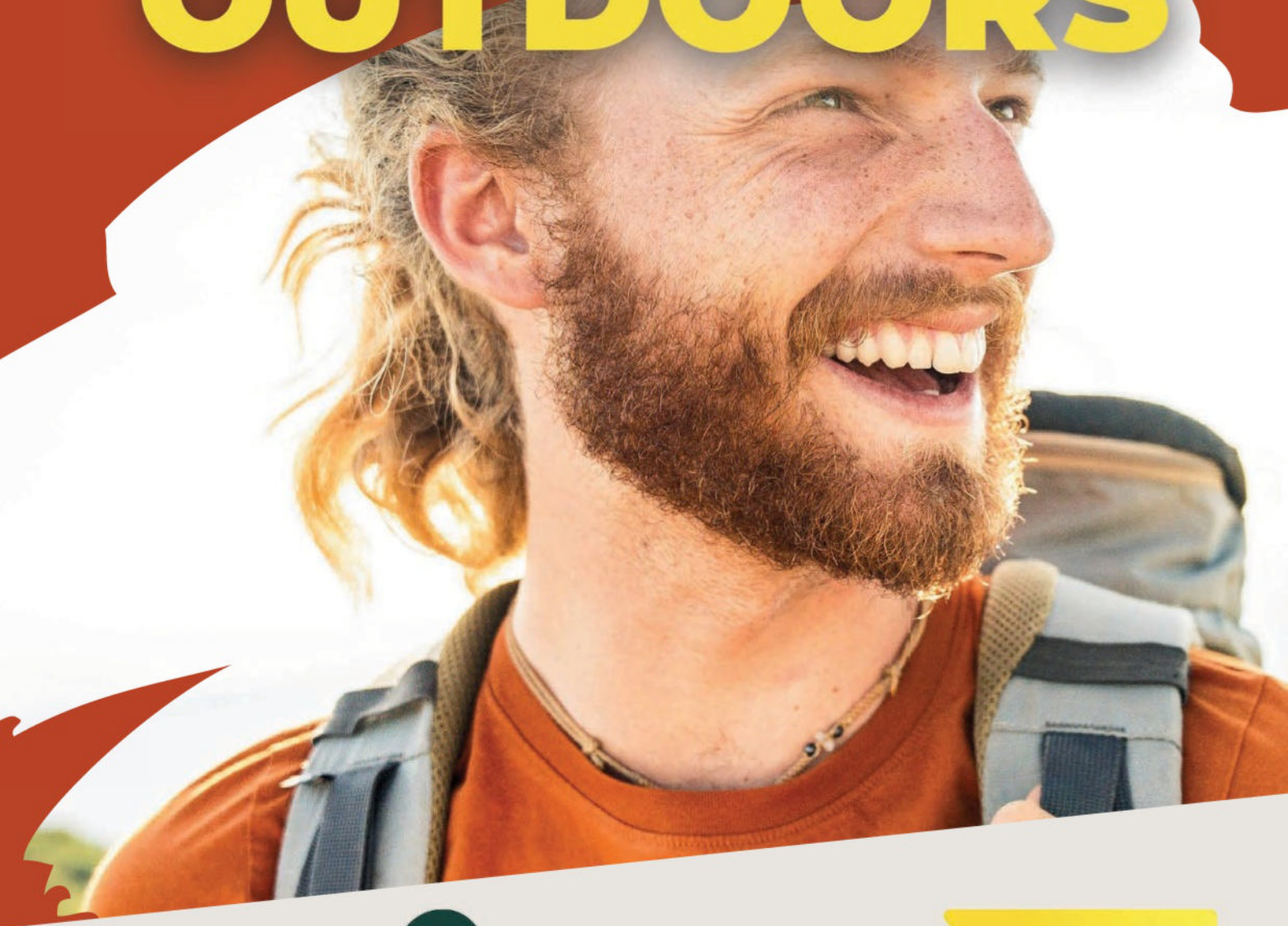
generous amount of storage. We liked the large under-seat drawer, too, but the open-fronted locker over the bench would have to be emptied for travel and we’d recommend the same philosophy with the style-over-substance wine rack, too. The furniture’s knock-on edging and the top locker doors that sit proud of their frames might be acceptable in a budget conversion but not at £80k.

The roof, from Pop Top UK, also lets the side down, with minimal ventilation. Its three windows let in daylight but the roof bed (1.88m by 1.09m mattress on a solid base) will become stuffy in warmer climes.

The spec also includes a 20-litre fresh water tank, a new power management system and a wireless phone charging pad. The Webasto diesel heating fitted here is a £1,674 option.



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SILVA SMINI

How did Silva's lightest headlamp get its name? Because it's Smini... Sorry, sometimes the compulsion for a dad joke is just too great. The Smini does very

much live up to its name, though, weighing just 38.5g (Smini Fly) and small enough to fit into the palm of your hand. And it proves that great things really do come in small packages. With its 250 lumens, this is the perfect companion to your campervan trips – ideal for night-time dog walks and late night trips to the toilet block. The functional design will also appeal to runners and adventurers.

PRICE £49.99

W fave.co/4bVtBnU



AKU OMNIA V-LIGHT GTX

Italian footwear brand, Aku, has created this new lightweight hiking shoe with outdoor adventures in all conditions in mind. Made from recycled materials, using eco-friendly methods and without the use of animal leather, the Omnia V-Light GTX is also designed to minimise its environmental impact.

PRICE £160

W fave.co/4hzma74



COLEMAN PRO 1.8L JUG

Part of the new Pro cooler collection, the Coleman Pro 1.8L Jug can keep both hot and cold drinks at the perfect temperature for hours. Constructed from copper-plated stainless steel, it's designed to stand up to the rigours of outdoor life, with a removable silicone sleeve providing grip and a handle to make pouring easy.

PRICE £48.99

W fave.co/4bPGMqx

ROBENS MERRICK LIGHT STRIP



This LED strip light, weighing just 90g, can be hung up inside your driveway awning or campervan with the three adjustable carabiners to give a unique lighting solution. The strip can also be squashed into its polyester pouch to create a mini lantern.

PRICE £26.99

W fave.co/4iPdASG



EASY CAMP WILLOW COMPACT CHAIR

What can you buy these days for £23? A round of drinks in a London pub? Lunch for four at McDonald's? A bucket of popcorn at your local multiplex? You'll be lucky. But what you can get for £23 is the new Willow Compact camping chair from Danish brand, easy camp. And for a chair of this quality, that represents incredible value for money. Although it comes with a small price tag, this is a far cry from those flimsy folding chairs you can pick up at motorway service stations.



OUTWELL EAGLE VAN

Designed for use between the front seats on campervans, the Outwell Eagle Van soft cooler features a large Velcro, U-shape top opening for easy access.

It is said that it will keep the contents cool for 13 hours using an 800ml ice block, thanks to the 20mm foam. Features include twin carry handles, mesh side pockets and an easy-clean lining.

PRICE £43.99

W fave.co/4kKJXE1

co/4kKJXE1



It weighs just 1.5kg and packs small into its carry bag, so it's easy to stash a couple in the 'van for setting up at the campsite, and just as handy for taking to the beach or a festival.

Despite its light weight, the steel frame is strong and durable so it's not going to let you down at the campsite. And it's easy to set up – simply attach the fabric to the frame and you're good to go.

PRICE £22.99

W fave.co/4hDQOfF

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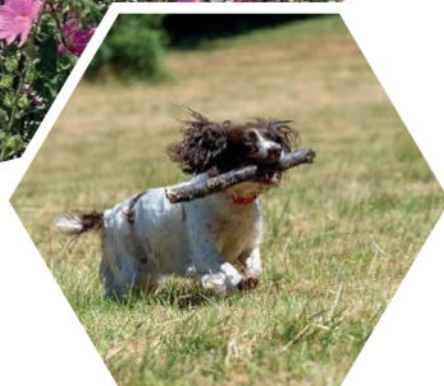
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